

AS IT HAPPENED



JOSEPHINE WINFIELD BRAKE

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Being a Story in Three Books
and Several Manners

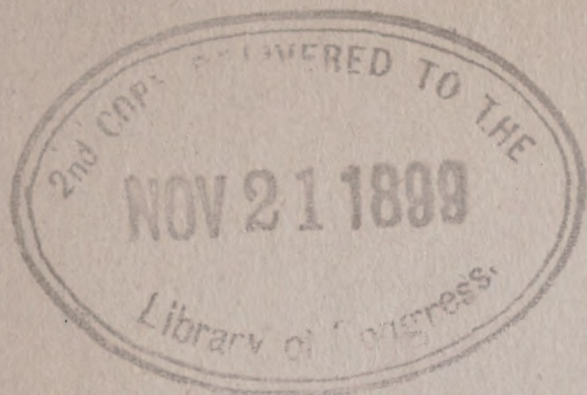


BY JOSEPHINE WINFIELD BRAKE

“O, love is like the rose,
And a month it may not see
Ere it withers where it grows.”

BAILEY'S *Festus*.

Washington : From the Publishing House of
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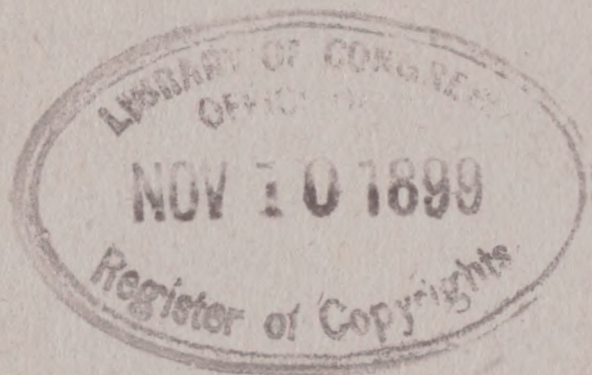
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AND TO ONE OTHER WHO WILL READ
BETWEEN THE LINES.

AS IT HAPPENED.

Book First.

THE MAN WHO DESIRED.

CHAPTER I.

Selene had moments of illumination. One fell upon her as she stood poised in the center of the picture. It was a living picture. True, living pictures were old, but nothing else drew quite so well in the town of Barcelona, which had not got over beginning to call and feel itself a city upon the strength of the census ordered by the town itself. That had shown something like forty thousand people. Naturally, the inhabitants of Barcelona were no longer content to reckon themselves among the *bourgeoise*. Civic pride, not to mention piety, demanded of them churches metropolitan in their elegance. But aspiring communities, like aspiring individuals, have a trick of finding themselves lacking the wherewithal to make real their fine and well-laid plans.

The women in St. Ignatius stood stanchly behind the vestrymen in their plan of turning

the parish and the parish church upside down and inside out. The church itself was a massive stone building, something squat, something square, with only one bell and the merest figment of stained glass. The devout men and devouter women set their hearts upon a new bell tower, a springing companile to rise above the vestry, and fling abroad the notes of bells in chime. They planned, too, a new altar, windows all the length of the church more gorgeous than Sheba's gems, a roof of Gothic frettings, and pews in themselves provocative of devotion. The struggle to secure all these things was so keen and sharp a good few among the very elect of the sanctuary forgot or overlooked that there were such things as aching hearts or hungry bodies in this well-churched world.

To say the women of St. Ignatius meant, of course, Mrs. Witherby. She led in everything, the rest simply obeying her edicts. If now and then a malcontent appeared, she was straightway put to shame by the question, "Where would St. Ignatius be *now* if Mrs. Witherby had not vowed to keep it even with the rival parish of Calvary?" Calvary had at the best three rich men in its congregation to St. Ignatius' two. But one malcontent had ever been known to parry that thrust, and she took herself incontinently into the hostile camp of Calvary.

Mrs. Witherby was rising fifty. In her

youth she had been sylph-like, with the narrowest hips and shoulders. Added flesh made her almost cylindrical. She was, furthermore, erect, with a lineless face, an edged voice, and a pair of the coldest blue eyes that ever twinkled from beneath brown-lashed lids. Notwithstanding her flesh, she kept still some pretension to beauty, was always correctly gowned and prided herself not a little upon the fact that she was never in any point more than a month behind the extreme of New York fashion.

Back in the dark ages of an unfashionable youth Mrs. Witherby had contracted a habit of dominating the entertainments of her church. In that same remote period she had learned that even the churchliest felt the appeal of spectacle—spectacle within proper restrictions. Then the spectacle was labeled as tableaux. Mrs. Witherby and her world had, of course, got very far beyond anything so semi-rural. With them it was a cantata, a sacred drama—the ten virgins duly staged drew many shekels into the Lord's treasury—or an oracle with processional accompaniment. Perhaps it was the processional accompaniment which suggested to Mrs. Witherby her crowning achievement—"The Historical Procession of the Centuries."

It must be confessed that the centuries were personified by figures somewhat capriciously chosen. Mrs. Witherby did the choosing, with

some faint show of modifying suggestion from Earle Brewster. Earle had spent a couple of years abroad, and had brought back no less than nine pictures, all with foreign names scribbled indistinctly in the corners. Possession of so much art gave him a sort of prescriptive right to knowledge of any sort of pictures. "Hang chronology! You want above everything figures that are picturesque," he had said. "Big, splendid women who know how to wear clothes, or to go without them, and men who had backgrounds, whatever else they may have lacked."

The saying certainly explained Semiramis. Without the vivifying suggestion it contained Mrs. Witherby would never have thought of Assyria's warrior empress. It is problematical, too, if, after she had pitched upon the character, she would have cast Selene for it but for the fate which we miscall chance. As Mrs. Witherby herself explained, the procession was so immense she was simply forced to go outside the leaders, or go without proper performers.

It began with the casting out from Eden. That ought to have been tremendously impressive, but was marred by the fact that Adam's skin-coat sat very much awry, being, in fact, Judge Witherby's fur-lined coat worn wrong side out, and much too big for its inhabitant. Then, too, the Angel of the Flaming Sword had a head too small for his halo. Mrs.

Witherby breathed a long, relieved sigh when the curtain fell, and said in Earle Brewster's ear: "Thank heaven, we are through with the Scriptures. Now there is room for effect without shocking anybody's sensibilities."

Succeeding pictures had won applause, sometimes hearty, but oftener perfunctory. *Semiramis* came seventh on the list. When the curtains parted, revealing her bending slightly to take a tribute of pearls presented by a captive barbarian warrior in a casket of beaten gold, there was an instant flattering hush, broken only by the deep-strained breaths which speak of rapt vision.

Selene was tall, but somehow people had not noticed it before. She was of a mold at once imperial and motherly. Her blue black silky hair grew low about a broad, smooth brow, and swept back in heavy masses that seemed to shape themselves naturally into a proper resting place for a crown. Her throat was an ivory pillar, melting into the swell of broad shoulders and firm, cleanly-modeled bust. She had deep blue, black-lashed eyes, that in some lights and some moods were wells of liquid purple, yet harmonized amazingly with the warm olive of her skin, the varying rose of her cheeks, and the vivid scarlet of her lips.

The lips themselves were the keynote to her character—warm, soft, vivid, neither large nor small, well cut, and full of subtle potentialities, now softening to an enchanting smile, now

hardening to a thin, immobile line. They were sensuous lips, yet in no wise sensual. In them one read, if only one were wise enough, a nature that could love, defy time, defy scorn or slight, doubly defying death, yet so balanced and rounded it could hold itself hard, even against itself.

Her royal robe was of purple, bordered with ermine, and barbarically bedizened with gold and gems. It fell away from the columnar throat, bare save for a rope of pearls—the same pearls which were the captive's gift. He knelt at her feet, holding up the casket with both hands. She had made fast the gemmy strand and wound it with slow, imperial grace again and again about her throat. History, of course, gave no warrant for the action, but in behalf of church decoration Barcelona felt that it could afford to make history to please itself. And nobody could deny that the winding of the pearl rope added life to the picture, to say nothing of displaying Selene's fine arms. The sleeves fell away from them at the shoulder, and they were covered with bracelets half way to the elbow. Any other woman so bedight would have looked poor and tawdry. Selene herself might not have borne the burden of it but for the strange inner light which shone from her, making her whole personality so radiant it brought her gorgeous setting into properly subdued tone.

Two black-clad slaves stood back of her, wav-

ing quaint, long-handled fans above her head. Her throne was richly gilt and raised upon a dais of gold and purple. At the back there was a note of scarlet in the hangings. In the foreground a small chest of carved wood, overflowing with rich Eastern stuffs. And as she wound the pearls about her throat a reed-player hidden amid the palms in the background blew and blew, as though timing her motion, now loudly as in triumph, now in wailing minors, as though crying defeat and beseeching the victor's mercy.

One minute of the hush—then the house shook with thunders of applause. Again, again, came the cries, the handclappings. The curtains had to be drawn thrice before the clamor was stilled. Even with that nobody had his fill of gazing. Mrs. Witherby ought to have been enraptured. Instead of that she frowned faintly. Earle Brewster was at her elbow. He had half forced her to take her place in front of the curtain, saying masterfully (he was in most things masterful): "If you stay behind you will make everybody so nervous; the whole thing will be a failure. You have done your best—more than anyone else, possibly, could do. Now trust providence a little."

"I will—if you will help providence," she had said; but he shook his head obstinately. "Those poor martyrs have come to regard me as after a sort your second self," he said. "I shall help

them very much more by sitting in next to the front row and looking as though I knew it was impossible for anybody to bungle." The event had proved his wisdom, yet he did not exult over the fact. Mrs. Witherby, glancing up at him as the curtains at last hid Semiramis from view, was amazed by the look in his face. It had grown very white, the mouth was set, the eyes tensely brilliant. She laid her hand lightly upon his arm, saying, in a guarded whisper: "Are you ill? Had you not better go out for a breath of air?"

He shrank lightly from her touch. His color came back with a rush, and the lids dropped over his steely gray eyes. They ought to have been blue eyes. Aside from them he was of the flaxenest Saxon type, his face clean cut and impassive, his chest broad and deep, his stature something beyond middle height. Altogether, he had a thoroughbred look until one came to examine minutely. Then one saw that the fine, well-kept hands, soft and flexile and long-fingered as they were, had stubbed finger-tips and the short nails that bespeak strong animal instincts. The tale they told was repeated and confirmed in the lines beneath the chin and the thick, fleshy involutions of the smallish ears. A physiognomist would have gathered thence, and rightly, that here was a man of force and fire, imperious as death, inflexible in pursuing his own ends, holding to his own purposes,

swayed but never melted by the tropic glow of passion, and, in the exactions of surrender, cruel as the grave.

Barcelona neither knew nor cared for all this. It took the surface Earle Brewster to its heart of hearts, and reckoned him in all points the model he was in a manner bound to be. He had been born to a good name and very considerable riches. He had married not over happily, it is true, but fate had kindly relieved him within five years, leaving him as mementoes of his dead wife a small, imperious daughter and a fortune even larger than his own. It was his absolutely—the dead woman had loved him so entirely she had flouted settlements. Perhaps it was her trust which had moved him, or, likelier, the stirrings of remorse that had made him promise her upon her deathbed that she should have no successor.

People generally understand that such promises are made to be broken. People about Earle Brewster said as much, adding, however, that here was the exception to the rule. Whatever he had promised that he would keep, no matter at what stress to himself. But they did not look for any sort of stress. Earle was past the age of hot and dazzling passions. Perhaps, if left free, he might have wedded again after a decorously long interval. As it was, with his child and his ambitions, he would doubtless do very well, and certainly keep faith

with the woman who slept so peacefully under a costly marble shaft upon the fairest hilltop of Barcelona's cemetery.

He had known Selene ever since she was ten years old. That is to say, he had been nebulously conscious that such an entity existed and moved about within his local environment. He might even have been able to tell one who sought knowledge of her that she was orphaned and without near kin; that she had been married at fifteen to a man much her senior, who had died within six months, leaving her but slender provision; that she lived with her husband's mother, who was also widowed and drew a pension; that the two went out very little, and, though they had a pew in St. Ignatius, came but irregularly to church. So much he might have repeated, and, in repeating, echoed the reiterated gossip of his world in general, his mother and Mrs. Witherby in particular. But of Selene herself—the soul, the woman—he was profoundly ignorant until he saw Semiramis.

"I had rather it had been anybody else—yes, anybody," Mrs. Witherby said, nodding almost imperceptibly toward the stage. "Of course, I am glad to have the Procession a success, but that sort of thing is so very apt to go to the head of—well, you know that sort of person."

Earle got up somewhat abruptly, saying: "Excuse me; I have just thought of something that must be done," and hurried down the

aisle. Two minutes later he was behind the scenes, smiling down at Selene whimsically, and saying, as he kissed her hand: "I am too good an American, much too good a republican, to miss such an opportunity of showing my sense of the fact that even in the manufacture of empresses these United States beat the world."

CHAPTER II.

Selene drew away her hand with a little deprecatory laugh. The illumination was dying. In its stead there had come a sort of tremulous pallor. It amazed, it almost frightened her. Her ear was not wholly unused to gallant speeches. True, she had lived in semi-seclusion throughout the twelve years of widowhood, but more than one man had tried to come a-wooing and been sent civilly about his business. She was not reckoned among Barcelona beauties, nor of those who led its fashion, yet there was that in her face, in her slow, soft graciousness, her restful charm, which had sufficed to ensnare vagrant fancies.

She was slow mentally, but it was a sort of alert slowness, very far removed from stupidity. It was part of her equable temperament. She had a sort of cushiony and good-humored tolerance for all the world, herself included. Witness the fact that she did not fret over finding in mind in the morning the retort or the quip which should have sprung into being overnight. Although she was well toward thirty, her nature had kept in many points the elemental simplicity of a child's. She had loved her husband with a timid fondness—rather as one under direction than as one who makes a heart's choice. He had been her guardian

and always more than kind. When he had said, "My girl, you must marry me," she had obeyed just as she would have obeyed had he said, "My girl, you must go away to school."

She had mourned him with a deep yet placid sorrow. Often in the first years she had felt amazed, almost shocked, indeed, at herself, for finding life still good, the world green and beautiful, the sunlight an enchantment, now that he was no longer there to share in it all. She was lonely, desolate even at times, but her's was not the searing sorrow that bore down his mother, whitening her hair in a week, making her face drawn, her eyes heavy with weeping, her nights one long rebellion and ache of loss and longing. "I wonder if I should feel so, too, if I—if we had a child." Selene sometimes speculated a little wistfully. In the face of daylight she told herself it must be she had no capacity for deep feeling of any sort. She could wish it otherwise. Anything, even crushing sorrow, might be better than the deadly dullness of void days. In her heart of hearts she knew better, knew that deep underneath there lay a volcanic stratum, that might one day rise to appal her or to destroy.

Until that night Earle Brewster had been among the commonplaces of her existence. His home lay quite at the outside of Barcelona, but every day she saw him driving past, sometimes alone in his dog cart; oftener in the handsome open carriage, with his lady mother on the seat

beside him. He never drove with his little girl. The child had her own trap, with a nurse and groom to take her for airings. Once upon a picnic excursion Selene had gone past the Brewster demesne and seen a small, haughty person who gave herself airs sitting in a basket chair strapped to the back of a meek gray donkey, which a groom, almost as meek-looking, led up and down the lawn.

Five days in each week Selene worked half the day. Barcelona had a circulating library, which kept open for that space of time. Selene hated the work. Not work in general, but this tedious going over and giving out of books, putting them in place again, keeping records and tallies, warning delinquents, and making a roll of such as must be dealt with for the powers that were. She did not care much for books unless they had pictures in them, or told of painters, painting, or in some way opened up the magical mysteries of form and color. All her life she had craved to be an artist. If only she could fix in imperishable form the dreams and fancies and glories that swam before her in the snow, the sunshine, the rain, then, indeed, existence would have new meaning for her and would seem a gift precious beyond rubies.

The library held her prisoned from nine until one. Throughout the afternoons and the blessed Saturdays she went out, nearly always alone, nearly always with her sketch-

book. Her sketches were the despair of the Barcelona drawing masters, but once, when she had slipped up to the city, a hundred miles away, and sought out an artist, he had looked at them narrowly, some of them more than once, then flung them down, saying almost irritably as he looked her over: "Here, you have the feeling, the thing that really makes the artist; but you know nothing except what it will trouble you to forget. Two years of forgetting, with three of learning might—but, no; it is impossible—your age is against it—then, too, you say you have no money. Better give up the thought altogether. Of course, you will not give up this sort of thing," touching the sketches as he spoke. "It will hardly profit you materially, but I doubt if in the end it will not do you more real good, give you more real happiness, which is the end of all things, than if you starved and studied and endured all things in hope of a career."

He showed himself cruelly kind. A whole brood of fluttering, half-fledged hopes and plans were struck down by his words. The elder Mrs. Barber was as wax in Selene's hands. "You are all my boy left me—all I have to live for, Selene," she had said in the first abandonment of her grief, laying her head upon Selene's throbbing breast. Since then there had been but one will in the household. It spoke volumes for the sanity and wholesomeness of Selene's nature that her mother-in-

law's abject submission made her only the more regardful of her wishes.

The two lived simply, yet with a certain touch of elegance. Their home was their own, so the narrow joint income sufficed. If the house was unpretentious, it was very comfortable—a gray cottage, with a tiny yard in front and a bit of garden back. Selene made the most of both spaces. Throughout the short northwestern summer she kept them riotously a-blossom with sweet, old fashioned flowers. Flowers, indeed, were her companions, counselors, and often her comforters. They spoke to her as human lips could not speak. Even the humblest had its message for her, but most of all she loved the roses. She wore them in her hair and at her throat. Their color and fragrance made up for her the whole joy of June.

As Earle Brewster stood smiling down at her, suddenly there came to her a great waft of rose scent, and she was aware of someone approaching with a sheaf of hothouse roses in the hollow of his arm. The rose-bearer looked inquiringly at Earle, who nodded slightly and held out his hand. In the next breath he was saying, as he crowded the flowers upon her, "See how provident I am? It was borne in upon me this morning, that somebody tonight would make a famous success, and I determined to reward that person fittingly."

"Oh, I do not know. The Procession is not done yet; besides, there are the singers and the

young lady who recites," Selene murmured; her eyes again illumined as they rested upon the flowers. Brewster shrugged his shoulders expressively. "I wish you would be honest," he said. "You might—with me. You know as well as I know that the minute and a half of you was worth—yes, more than worth—all the three hours of the rest."

"You are too kind," Selene said. "No, I had better say, not quite kind. Let me divide the flowers. There are enough for all."

"No." Earle put out his hand decisively. "They are your property, of course. You can keep them or throw them away, but I will not have them scattered as though they were so much rubbish. Do you know what happens to those ill-conditioned persons who slight a gift before the giver's eyes?"

"No; what is it?" Selene asked, laughing again—a little odd laugh that masked a shiver. Brewster looked at her, pretending to frown portentously. "I cannot tell you—here," he said, glancing about the cramped, disordered space. "Instead, I shall come some evening and tell you, when you cannot escape paying me the attention the subject deserves."

"I shall have to tell the rector how you discourage unselfishness," Selene said, lightly. She was still trembling, but her pallor had vanished. A soft, steady stain of rose burned in either cheek. Brewster let his eyes rest on her with a long, devouring gaze. "It is odd," he

said, at last. "We have known each other always and are just now finding each other out. How do you account for it?"

"I do not account for it—because I do not know it," Selene said, not trying to meet his gaze. He shook his head impatiently. "Why do you fence with me?" he said. "Something has happened to us tonight. You know it as well as I."

"Let me go! You must! I have to change my dress," Selene said, drawing away from him. She was still in her royal robes. Again he caught her hand, lifted it level with his head, and let his fingers follow the line of her bare arm. She drew back with flashing eyes. A tall screen, one of the many properties crowded back of the stage, cut them off from other view. "I think a gentleman would hardly take such advantage of time and place," she said, speaking very low. He stood directly in her path, and showed no inclination to step out of it. "You know I am helpless," she went on, in the same hushed voice. "That I will not, I cannot protest here. Now please let me pass. See, I am keeping your flowers. I will even promise not to throw them away, but to take them straight home with me."

"You are not going?" he said, decidedly. "Not for two hours, that is. You must stay for the reception, you know. Mrs. Witherby will never forgive either of us if the star of her choice Procession does not show up there."

"That shows how little you understand about matters of this sort," Selene said. "If Mrs. Witherby remembers me at all it will be to be glad I had sense enough to go away when I was no longer useful or, ornamental. Oh, I am not the least bit angry over it. She cannot help being what she was born, any more than you or I can."

"What a lot of bad manners your doctrine would saddle on our Creator," Earle said, irreverently. Selene gave him a look, then moved as if to pass him. He stepped aside, but only half way—if she passed him she must brush close to his breast. His eyes were hard and bright. An unwonted red showed faintly in the ivory bronze of his cheek. Seeing her hesitate he smiled and drew yet further back, beckoning her to pass. Suddenly they heard Mrs. Witherby's voice, dry and rasping. She was saying acidly: "Has anybody seen Mrs. Barber? I must find her. You know she has a lot of jewels. I do hope she knows enough to keep them safe until I can get them in my hands."

"Here they are," Selene began, darting out and beginning nervously to strip herself of her gauds and gewgaws. Brewster stepped to her side, an ugly sneer on his face. He looked Mrs. Witherby squarely in the eye and said, raising his voice so all could hear: "Blame me for any delay in handing back the jewels, Mrs. Witherby. I alone am answerable. Mrs. Barber has been anxious to be rid of them ever since

she left the stage." Then to Selene: "You have been kind enough to say I may take you home. When you are ready you will find me just outside the stage door."

Selene walked away slow and stately, her head high, her eyes burning. Mrs. Witherby gasped and turned to Brewster. He had vanished. A scowl so black settled upon her face. One onlooker said to another, speaking low and behind his hand: "Here's a tableau that does not fit into the Procession, yet I will lay odds it would bring down the house."

"You're right," nodded the other. "Oh, but Sister Witherby is in a heavenly frame of mind. She'll never forgive herself for bringing out the young widow Barber so, though there is at least three hundred dollars in the hall to-night."

Selene was coming back, still slow, still stately, still with the light in her eyes. She walked straight up to Mrs. Witherby and huddled a glittering mass into her hands, saying: "Please let me know tomorrow if all you entrusted me with is there." Then with a ceremonious bow she passed on into outer darkness.

CHAPTER III.

A fortnight later Selene stood in her little parlor, leaning her elbow on the mantle and gazing into the red depths of a glowing fire. It was late winter. Outside the pavement rang under the tread of casual feet, the air was crisply vital, as it has a trick of being when winter is on the turn of spring, and the wind blew up the street and around corners with an edge of steel in its teeth.

Yet the room was odorous all through with the fresh sweetness of roses—hothouse roses, heavy-headed, loose-petaled blossoms, full sisters to those which had been thrust upon Selene while she wore her royal robes. They had come to her that morning—a great boxful. Inside there was a note, which ran: "No doubt you think you have escaped me. By these presents learn your mistake. I am coming tonight, whether or no I may, to teach you what risk you run when you slight the gifts of the gods."

There was no name, but she had understood perfectly, and dropped the bold screed with a little happy cry. Her heart had been yearning, hungering, wondering, all the days since their parting. He had left her upon her own doorstep, pressing her hand warmly in both his own and saying very low: "Remember—until I come." She had remembered—ah, how

faithfully!—never dreaming of doubt or mistrust when his coming was delayed. Her days had been full of happy unrest. Through half the night she had lain staring into the darkness, filling its void with memories of his looks, his tones, the turn of his head, the tensely thrilling clasp of his hands.

Something of maiden shyness yet clung to her. She was amazed at herself because of this open delight in love. It was love. At last she knew what love meant. A flood of bliss, immeasurable, unfathomable, had caught her away from her gray, lonely life, and borne her into a realm of faery. At last she comprehended the heights and depths of the human heart, the human soul, the gladness of full joy, the sadness of lack and loss. The comprehension made her infinitely tender toward her husband's mother. The two had never jarred, but their lives had gone forward in a certain subdued key, each taking the other's regard upon trust and neither going to the pains of letting the other see it was more than casual.

Now Selene could not endure that. She smiled at her companion across the breakfast table, kissed her when she went away to work, waved her a greeting as soon as she was in sight of home, and in a hundred tender, small ways made the elder woman happy. Mrs. Barber was small and slight, with little wisps of dry hair always blowing about her face. She had a wistful sympathy with Selene's changed mood.

"Seems like you are getting ready to blossom with the flowers, daughter," she said more than once when Selene broke into a snatch of song or gave an especially sunshiny laugh. "I am glad of it—so glad," the poor mother went on. "That was John's last thought—last wish. 'Try to make my girl happy, mother,' he said to me almost the very last thing—not an hour before he died. I have tried, but somehow I'm afraid I haven't known very well how to do it. I've been afraid even to love you too much for fear it would not please you."

Selene had stopped her there with kisses—kisses warm and fond, such as women often give their hurt children, who come nearest their heart of hearts. "One can never have enough love, mother," she had said. "I believe God is love, and life is love. It is sacrilege to even think of loving too much."

To-night she had put on a Greek gown of heavy, lusterless white stuff. It fell about her in classic folds that gave a new distinction to even her perfect outline. Her hair made a dusky coronal above her brow. There was a vivid crimson rose enmeshed in it, just where the rich reflections of it would best set off the creamy pallor of the forehead. Another rose, as red, and richly full-blown, nestled amid the lace upon her breast. Neither ribbon nor trinket marred the swan-curve of the bare white neck. Indeed, the only gleam of metal about her was that thrown up by her wedding ring—a heavy band of beaten gold, which never left

her finger. Mrs. Barber had looked at it with humid eyes as Selene passed through the sitting room on her way to the parlor. All the life left in her withered frame concentrated upon the memory of her son. For his memory she was bitterly jealous. She would go mourning all her days, so it had seemed to her impossible that Selene's heart should wake and stir to a new blossoming. She had even seen the change in her without comprehending it until the roses came. They spoke a language she could not affect to misunderstand—the first word of it and the last was love.

Still, she had said nothing. In all things she was just. She had told herself over and over again it was better so. She felt her strength ebbing yearly. A little while and Selene would be alone. It was better, ever so much better, that she should form new ties, make for herself the potentiality of a new home, when the old one, safe and narrow, was both desolate and impossible. Her pension as an officer's widow (Colonel Barber had died at the head of his men in the fighting before Richmond) was much more than half their maintenance. She wondered a little if she had not been wrong in not letting John go to take his father's vacant place. He had been wild to do it, but he had seemed to her so young—only sixteen, though of man's full stature—she had clung to him and kissed him, and besought him, until he had agreed to stay at home.

If he had gone there might have been a pen-

sion for his widow. Somehow, though he had not lacked brains or industry, he had never got nearer success than the promise of it. He was himself so open, so honest, so steadfast, it did not occur to him that other men who made fair weather to his face could be less so. He had trusted them to his hurt again and again, without ever learning the lesson of suspicion. It was his mother who grew angry and said bitter things of his ill-users. He gave them the tolerant charity of silence when all other charity was impossible.

Selene's father had been his closest friend, and Selene herself he had loved from babyhood. When he married her he had deemed himself on the high road to fortune—fortune which he coveted mainly for her sake. As simply his ward, society would not let him love and care for her; as his wife, he could give her without let or hindrance all that her beauty-worshiping nature craved.

Death is sometimes a crowning mercy. It was certainly so in the case of John Barber. He had died quickly—almost painlessly—just one day too soon to know that the venture in which he had risked everything had come to naught. Selene had knelt beside him, sobbing as a child sobs, with his failing fingers threading her silken hair. But his eyes had lifted with their last light to his mother's faded blue ones, and the glance was at once an entreaty and a benediction.

"I must not grudge her happiness, no matter how it comes," the mother repeated inly, as the door shut behind Selene. She did not know who had sent the roses. Selene had been delightfully vague in her tale of the Procession and her own triumph in it. Earle Brewster's name would have deepened Mrs. Barber's heart-ache to apprehension. Socially she was far wiser and more learned than her daughter. She knew that though the Barbers and Brewsters were born equals, both of that lustier New England stock which had transplanted itself for the peopling of the Northwest, there had come a great change since the time of the Civil War, in which Earle Brewster's father made a fortune. Ever since his wife (Earle's mother) had held herself very high—not, it is true, cutting her old familiar friends outright, but treating them with a distant, icy friendliness, much harder to endure than an actual slight. She had joined with Mrs. Witherby in ruling Barcelona's upper crust until the town spread and grew beyond their domination.

Still they kept rein over their own faction of its social world. It was well nigh an absolute despotism. Earle himself rebelled against it now and then only, and never, it was said, very successfully. Oddly enough, he had married to please himself, in spite of strong opposition from both his social arbiters. Still more oddly, his wife had very soon conquered a peace with them. She had been a slender, fair-haired

woman, with insolently beautiful blue eyes and a languid, creamy voice, who had not hesitated to flout openly the best of Barcelona, or to let it be known how immeasurably inferior, in her opinion, Barcelona and Barcelonians were to everything in her native East.

Yet she had not cared to live there. "We should only be part of the people," she had explained, languidly. "Here we are *the* people." If her meaning was not plain to the listener she had not cared to elucidate it. Her husband had never been quite sure whether he most loved or hated her. There had been scenes from almost the first week of the honeymoon. More than once he had gone away vowing inly it was for good. But he had always come back before very long, drawn by the triple chain of habit, association, and affection.

His father had died just as he came out of college. Ever since the weight of great concerns had rested upon him, not crushingly, but with a sort of steadying force. Semi-occasionally he liked being a man of affairs. At other times, in the depths of his own conscience, he was honest enough to face the conviction that living meant to him pleasing himself. Whatever he craved that he set himself to gain, not regardless of who might suffer by the gaining, but in the manner that should make his gratification of least offense to his world.

For example, occasionally there fell on him a madness for gaming. For a while he let it

gnaw; then, when the desire became so acute there was a certain exquisite delight in the pain of it, he went away to one of the great cities, searched out some game of hazard, and won and lost, won and lost, until he no longer cared for the pastime. Wine did not appeal to him. He was too full-blooded, too possessed of a spirit approximating the glow of intoxication; but if he had chosen to drink, he would have done it after the same contained and self-protective fashion. As to women, specifications are needless. Given a man of such temperament, celibate or widowed, and the commonest understanding can supply probabilities.

Something of all this Mrs. Barber knew through her dead son's confidences—confidences he had never dreamed of giving to Selene's young ears. Though John was ten years the older, he had chanced to know Brewster better than the mass. The two had not been closer than surface friends—John's mother, indeed, was his only intimate—but he had liked Brewster after a sort, and discussed him as a type rather than an individual, saying sometimes: "Brewster seems to me to be a revival, a reversion to the old Puritan buccaneers, who sat in meeting and sang devoutly, between whiles the voyages they made on the high seas to plunder and to slay. He has the primal human instincts, hot and strong underneath his veneer of Puritan descent and college training. He would not

outrage the veneer for his right hand. He is as far from giving in upon any point where he has set his heart. A moral whirlwind even could not take him out of himself. He might die for a thing which he believed to be right, but the dying would have to be done strictly in accord with the conventions of his own mind."

Human judgments are errant. John Barber perhaps had seen no deeper than his fellow-men. Certainly there was nothing sinister in the look of Earle Brewster as he stood upon the Barber steps pulling at the asthmatic bell. It sent a feeble tinkle through the resounding spaces inside, but no noise of steps came after for the space of a minute. Earle smiled at the delay. As it lengthened by another minute his smile grew merrier. He made no effort to ring again. When at last Selene opened the door, keeping herself shielded by the leaf of it, he slipped inside, saying, with no pretense of greeting: "I know all about it. You thought I had waited so long it would not hurt to make me wait a minute longer."

"You are quite right," Selene said, a dimpling smile playing about her mouth. "In fact, I had serious doubts as to whether I should or should not make you wait—always."

"Indeed," he said, taking both her hands in his. "There is a story back of that waiting. Come and let me tell it to you, then you yourself shall say what it means—caprice or destiny?"

CHAPTER IV.

"Are you sure, perfectly sure, you are quite right in your mind?" Selene said, affecting to look at him anxiously as they came into the lighted parlor. He still held the hand he had taken, and stooped to catch the other. The action brought them face to face. He studied her a breath's space, then caught her to him and kissed her twice, saying in her ear: "Wicked one, I see you mean to make sport of me—yet you know, quite as I know, the blessed truth."

"Let me go!" Selene said, drawing away from him. "You have no right—"

"Must our love be measured by the hours of our acquaintance?" he asked, pretending to frown at her. "Sit down here, you rebellious person. Do you not know it is wicked to waste our minutes together—our precious minutes—in vain contentions?"

"O, me! I wonder who is contending?" Selene said, sitting down as far from him as possible, her hands primly folded in her lap. For a minute he stood, leaning upon the mantel, looking down at her and affecting to see only vacancy. "I came in search of a queen, my soul's queen," he said. "I left her here only a little while back. Where can she be hiding?"

"Maybe you had better call in the police,"

Selene said, with eyes of meek innocence. She was fighting as woman fights her last desperate fight against the thrilling, overwhelming flood that sweeps her from all hold of herself. She had all a modest woman's pride; she did not wish to seem too light, too easily won. All he had spoken her heart had echoed in gracious gladness. She was throbbing through and through in the bliss of love acknowledged and returned, yet some instinct rose up within her to stay the acknowledgment of full surrender.

"O, but you are wicked!" he said, bending to take her face in his hands. "You leave to those eyes all the task of saying you are glad of my coming. Tell me so now with your lips, else I shall never let you go."

Selene shook her head and smiled. She dared not trust herself to speak. Her voice would be one tremor of joy—she was even afraid there would be tears in it. He sat down at her side and drew her head to his breast. "Be quiet! You know you belong to me," he said, imperatively. "We were born for each other, and have wasted ever so many years in finding out the fact. We will not waste another one. Darling, darling, do you think there is a power on earth that can keep us apart?"

In answer her hand crept shyly to his cheek. He drew the arm about his neck, and buried his lips in her hair. His arms clasped her convulsively. "At last—I have found my queen," he whispered, his voice a low, shaken whisper.

"My queen, who loves even as she is loved. That is only justice, sweetheart. Now, for two weeks I have endured the torment of the damned—all for your sweet sake."

"Why did you stay away?" Selene asked. He put her face a little away so he could look full into her eyes, as he answered: "Because I had to be sure."

"I do not quite understand," she began, trying to draw herself away. He held her fast, saying with a grim laugh: "Of course, she does not understand. The demons of pain and passion have not laid hold on her." Then quickly and softly: "It was this way, darling—when you took possession of me I was like a man dazed. It was so new, so strange, I could hardly believe it. I am no saint—even to you I shall not try to pose as one. I thought I knew every phase of passional attraction—of what men call love. This—this enchantment was—none of them. I was bewitched, taken out of, away from my usual self. You made the world. All I felt, or thought, or knew clearly, was a wild desire, a restless longing to seek you, to make you my own, and carry you away from all the world. I had got back to primal human instincts. Adam perhaps felt so for his Eve. The cave-dwellers, I make no doubt, had the same fierce and consuming passion for the mates they won in fight. You see, I am glazing nothing. It is my belief that in the beginning souls and bodies are created dual

units—one-half male, the other female. We are the parts of such a unit. The miracle is that we should have not known it sooner. I cannot get over that—it was the thing that made me doubt and led me to test our love by putting a thousand miles between us.”

“I am better than you. I never doubted,” Selene whispered, hiding her face in his breast as she spoke. He kissed her twice and went on: “You knew—women always know. But for your sake I had to be quite sure. I said to myself, ‘If the city can dispel this witchery I will let it do it. If time can weaken it, if distance can dull it, then I may live, lacking this woman. She is not supreme. I will see if her empire is over my soul—or only over eager and craving senses—’”

He stopped, put her gently out of his arms, got up and walked the room’s length two or three times. When he came back to her he was pale and quiet, his face drawn, his voice a little husky. “What need to tell the rest?” he said, “except that—you held me through everything. Your eyes shone between me and the gayest spectacle; your face rose before me like dawnrise when I was satiate with venal charms. I had to come back—to come back to my own. You cannot send me away.”

Selene was sobbing softly, her face hidden in her hands. After a little while he took the hands gently from her face and kissed the humid eyes. “Sweetheart, these are the last

tears you shall shed for me," he said. "I shall remember them always as the diamonds of my soul, the most precious of all created things."

"They are distilled from my love as the dew is distilled from the night," Selene said softly. "Indeed, I do love you. No, you did not make me do it—not any more than I made you. It must be fate. I—I am—so happy I—am almost frightened—it seems too good to last," the words coming hardly above her breath.

"It shall last!" he cried, with a low, triumphant laugh, again catching her to him. "Hush! I will have no ifs and buts," he went on. "The semblance of doubt, even, is sacrilege. You are mine, mine, mine, to have and to hold, so long as life endures."

Silence fell upon them—silence unbroken save by the loud beating of two hearts. Through long, blissful minutes he held her close, his lips now and then touching her forehead or burying themselves in the waxen softness of her cheek. Time and the world were not for those two. From heart to heart there ran the subtle sweetness which can transfigure minutes into eternities—make the narrowest confines as gorgeously wide as the universe. Love, the vital root of all that is, had sprung up for each at the glance of an eye into a rare and perfect fullness of blossom, whose breath was the true breath of heaven.

By and by Selene stirred a little and looked up into his face. "It is all so strange, so won-

derful!" she said. "How can it all have happened, when we had been passing each other by all these years and years?"

"Love is the crown of mystery as of blessing," Brewster said, thoughtfully. "I have asked myself the same question over and over. The one possible answer is the psychological moment. Something awoke your soul—it looked out of your eyes—and my soul recognized it. Darling, I hope you will never look again as you did just then, when my heart went down in the dust at your feet."

"Indeed! Why? I wish I might look so always—for you," Selene said, a little wistfully. Brewster laughed and kissed her again. "If you could," he said, "then I should be forced to turn Turk, and keep you forever veiled and behind barred doors. I cannot bear even to think of another man seeing in you what I saw—and being roused by it to something like the same emotion."

"There is no danger," Selene said, simply. "I suppose I am a little bit good looking—but nobody beside you ever found me beautiful. I am glad I am not outright ugly—ugliness of every sort is such a mistake."

"Yet—you would be ugly, disfigure yourself, for my sake?" Brewster said, not as though asking a question, but after the manner of one stating a fact. Selene sat up and looked thoughtful a minute, then said, slowly: "Yes! I would do even that to give you peace of mind."

But you will never need to ask it. I doubt if anybody else will ever give me more than a casual look."

"How very modest we are, all at once," Brewster said, laughing softly. "Selene, Selene, are you playing innocent, or have you truly been so wrapt in your own worlds of faery you do not know?"

"Know what?" Selene asked, leaning a little back and locking her hands behind her dusky head.

"That you are one of the most dangerously beautiful creatures in all the world," he said. "Once a man begins to perceive it, he has no chance whatever. It is not of the outflashing type, which stuns—and warns. Instead, it steals unawares upon you, with the softest, the most subtle allurements. Back in the dark ages you might have been hanged for witchcraft. Do you know that, sweetheart? If you do not, learn it now and walk warily in the knowledge. I may not be patient always with this enchantment. Some day I may try you with bell, book and candle, to see if it be true Christian woman's magic, or if you will fly away in a flash of sulphurous flame."

Selene gave him a happy glance—bird-like and liquid—as she answered: "If I practiced the black art there are other people and things that would disappear—not my poor self."

"O, me! I did not dream you were so vindictive," Brewster said, smiling. "Tell me, who are those people and what are those things?"

"The people—let me see!" Selene said, reflectively. "They are not so very many; only Squire Waite, who is so hard on the poor folk in his mill cottages—you will admit Barcelona could very well spare him—and Tobe Rickets, who breaks up birds' nests, and chases homeless dogs, and—well, yes, and Mrs. Witherby. Perhaps I ought not to hate her, but I do. It gives me a chill to pass her on the street since she insulted me so that night."

"I see you would make a discriminating reformer," Brewster said, again laughing. "Barcelona would be a better place to live in if you were its benevolent despot. Go on; tell me about the things. Which of them would you eliminate first?"

"The library—so I could not possibly have to keep it," Selene answered, promptly. "You can never know the weariness of it—the routine, the endless questions people ask, the mistakes they make, and the reflex ones I make. Books are good things, but, like women, I think, they should have their own homes and be kept forever in them."

"Poor, precious sweetheart!" he said, lifting her hand to his cheek. "Her slavery is almost ended. I will not let that go on a day longer than I can help?"

A heavy, halting step sounded upon the narrow flagged walk, and a fumbling hand pulled the asthmatic bell. Selene sprang up, but sat down precipitate. Mrs. Barber had opened the

door; she heard the caller stump inside and pass on to the sitting room. The next minute there was a tap at the door, and Mrs. Barber said, not looking within: "Excuse me, Selene; Squire Waite is here. He says he must see you a minute upon urgent business."

"Be sure you come back soon," Brewster said at the door. He had walked to it with his arm about Selene's waist. She turned and held up her lips for a kiss, smiling and blushing like a rose in June. As the door shut behind her she shivered violently. For a half-minute she stood still, her breath coming fast. Then she hurried across the narrow hall and on to the sitting-room hearth. Squire Waite stood upon it, fingering his hat with heavily gloved fingers, his back to the fire and his legs contentiously wide apart. He was a trustee of the library. Its establishment, indeed, was largely his work, though but little of his money had gone into it. Still he had much to say in its management, chiefly because, having retired from active business, he had heaps of time to potter with and pry into small affairs. He had resisted all Mrs. Barber's hospitable solicitations to seat himself. Selene knew that meant he had something disagreeable to say. He greeted her with a smile, that changed almost to a snarl as his eye took in the effect of her picturesque costume. His mouth hardened, his glance lost its furtive droop. He held up his head severely, and said, with almost no pretense of salutation: "I

thought I'd better come and tell you right off, Miss Selene. The trustees had a meeting to-night and resolved on some changes. Quite considerable changes, ye may say. Fact is, they amount to this: Yereafter the hours'll be from four in the aft'noon to nine at night. Ye see, it's mainly for the mill folks, and they ain't got daylight to spare. Now, you've give so far—well, we'll say—middling satisfaction, but we made up our minds tonight that in the fuchyer, with men and boys coming in, and all that, the lib'arian had ought to be a man—”

“I quite agree with you,” Selene said, clearly. “Have you come to give me notice, or shall I stay away at once?”

“O! Notice, of course,” the Squire said, beginning to shuffle his feet. “The new hours don't begin for a month, and then, too, we've got to find our man.”

CHAPTER V.

“O, Selene! What shall we do?” Mrs. Barber asked with white, dry lips as Squire Waite shuffled away. Selene flung up her head. She had fighting blood, a hot Highland strain, coming true and undiluted from a Scotch great grandfather, who had fought for bonny Prince Charlie. Besides, she was too happy to feel any sting or arrow of earthly existence. She looked straight into the fire a minute, then said, her lips curling faintly: “Do! We shall do excellently, mother! I was never quite so glad of anything as to be rid of my old-man-of-the-sea. I shall easily find something better. Of course, I cannot help but feel contempt for the way these people have managed. If they had said a word to me I would have told them I thought their plan a good one, and would gladly make way for the man of their choice. But to meet in secret! O, how I hate creeping, crawling things! But never mind, dear! We will not waste breath or lose sleep over them. Run away to bed and let me bring you a cup of hot milk. I dare say Mr. Brewster will be going soon—then I can lock up.”

“Brewster! Is it Earle Brewster?” Mrs. Barber almost gasped. “Selene, darling child; beware! O, do have a care. You know how he is situated—and even if he broke his promise his mother would never make you welcome.”

"Mother, mother, what a disconsolate little person you are! Do not borrow trouble! Do not, I entreat," Selene said, putting her arms about the elder woman, and hiding the wrinkled face in her breast. "As yet I cannot tell you—anything, but this you must believe: Whatever happens to me, and many things may happen, I shall never forget that I was John's wife—or that he thought me good enough to be your daughter. If I am good enough for that, then I am equal to anything. Only love me, dear, and trust—then all will be well."

Mrs. Barber began to sob—dry, choking sobs that made Selene shiver. For a minute she stood irresolute, then gently pushed the weeping woman down into an easy chair and turned toward the door. Mrs. Barber clutched her hand and said, brokenly: "Bear with me—a little while—daughter. All my thought—all—my—care, is—for you."

"I know it. Do not cry, mother! Do not! You break my heart," Selene said, lightly stroking the bowed head. It lifted beneath her hand. Mrs. Barber got to her feet, and said, almost steadily: "Go back now; back to your—lover," choking a little over the word. "Forgive me if I have saddened you when you were so happy. Good night. I am going to pray God to keep and guard my child."

A lump rose in Selene's throat. She could not speak, but with a quick, close kiss hurried away. She found Brewster pacing the parlor

back and forth like a caged animal. "You have been gone eternities," he said; then, after a sharp look, "and you have left yourself behind. What has happened? Tell me! Quick!"

While she told him his face cleared magically. "That is good news—the very best," he said. "I was wondering how I could end all that. It is quite out of the question—your staying there, where you would be the prey of curious eyes and gossiping tongues."

"I hate both, but have no reason to fear either," Selene said, a little proudly. "Please the good Lord, I never shall have. I myself am glad of the change—only I wish it had not come quite so unexpectedly. Mother is disturbed over it. I can see that very plainly. Not so much for the money, though I do not deny it has been a help, but because she thinks it shows I have made enemies—"

"What if you have? Leave me to take care of them," Brewster said, slipping his arms about her. Selene shrank ever so slightly, and said, turning away her head: "She thinks it is because of you I have made them. I am not sure but that she is right. What do you say?"

"That she is right," Earle said, promptly. "Mrs. Witherby—but there is no need to explain. You saw and heard her that night—suffice it that Mrs. Witherby is potent in Barcelona; likewise she has a tongue. It is partly my fault, all this, so you must leave to me wholly the remedying of things. I provoked

her. After I had left you I went back. Mother Witherby took me to task for my absence—rated me, in fact, as though I had been her lackey. ‘Where have you been, Earle?’ she asked as she caught sight of me. ‘I thought I could depend on you to help me to the last.’ ‘O,’ said I, ‘I have been helping you. I could not possibly let young Mrs. Barber go away feeling that she had got into a crowd where not one soul had the least comprehension of good breeding.’ I said it right out loud, too, where a dozen people heard it. As she could not discipline me for my insolence, she has thought up this way of taking her revenge on you. The Christian virtues as practiced by the Witherby standard are apt to make a normal and natural man sigh for a few un-Christian ones.”

“I understand,” Selene said, with a soft, slow smile. “But are you sure, quite sure, it is not to spite Mrs. Witherby that you are—here?”

“You are worse than a heathen and a heretic to even suspect such a thing,” Brewster retorted. “You must do penance for your sins. Sit down; no, not there—over in that dark high-backed chair, and let me look at you without speaking for full ten minutes.”

“‘There was silence in heaven for the space of half an hour,’” Selene quoted, mischievously. I see you are bent on finding out whether or no, as some people claim, that text proves that there are no women there.”

“Will you be quiet—very quiet?” Brewster

demanded, seating her in the chair and placing her arms to suit himself. As he laid one of them down he stooped and kissed the round, blue-veined wrist, then wheeled and almost ran to the farthest window, where he stood for some minutes staring blankly at the mirk outside. When he came back his face was set.

"I shall have to get away," he said, impatiently, glancing at his watch. "All I can say now is—trust me. Do nothing, say nothing, believe nothing—until I come again."

In a flash he was out of the room, the house, leaving Selene a figure of disquiet beside the fading fire.

Half an hour later she was in her own small room looking intently at her image in the old-fashioned, black-framed mirror above her equally old-fashioned chest of drawers. It had been her grandmother's and was one of the few bits remaining to her from the home she scarcely remembered. She had played with its brasses ever since she could toddle. The mirror had pictured her in her first long dress, with her hair put up to mask her extreme youth. It had held her image—a bride—and the image showed her the same face framed sombrely in widow's weeds. Somehow it seemed to her a companion. She was glad that she could look into its friendly depths and see for the first time her countenance transfigured and love illumined.

"O, but I am pretty—now," she said to her-

self, smiling and lifting her round white arms so their whiteness framed her face. "I never thought so before. I am sure, indeed, I was never so. It is the inner light—the reflected glory. Earle, my darling, how can I wait to see you? I wonder will you come tomorrow. You cannot be so cruel as to wait until next day. I wonder what would happen if—if you did not come at all? O God, spare me that trial. If I am idolatrous of Thy creature, give my idolatry some other punishment."

A strange and sudden heaviness fell upon her. It was not the heaviness of sleep, yet as soon as her head touched the pillow her eyelids dropped over her eyes, and her tense breathing became soft and full. She was sleeping—yet awake. Gradually she lost sense of her surroundings, or, rather, they seemed to melt and change wholly. The old mirror lost its black frame and changed to one set in ivory and supported upon rods of beaten gold. The room itself had spread and spread until she could barely distinguish upon its distant walls the shimmer of rich stuffs changing through every tender hue. Now they shone pink as the dawn, now dusk as the twilight, now sea-green as summer waves, or of the radiant blue of summer skies. Suffusions of gray and purple and rosy lavender played over the deeper tints. Now and again the gleam of a jewel—ruby, amethyst, emerald, sapphire, chrysoprase—clefth as with a sword thrust the changing hues.

The jewels were thick toward the ceiling. It was of vapour-white studded magically, with little scintillant stars. Underneath them everywhere mist-white draperies waved and hovered in softly scented breezes. They fell down like the foam of fairy cataracts upon a floor of white marble overlaid with rich rugs. A magnificent tiger skin, the head glaring as though alive, lay in the foreground. Upon it there was a chair, throne-shaped, and all over gold, with a golden footstool before it. A shadowy figure stood back of it, with arm outheld as though to place upon the head of whoever might sit upon the throne a crown of thorns, massy and rusted, and dripping at the points with blood.

Chilled and shaking with horror, Selene saw herself in the golden mirror advance toward the chair. Her image was robed in the same mist-white of the draperies. It seemed to be translucent. She could see clearly as it passed the mysterious flickering lights playing upon the tinted walls beyond. Slowly it encircled about the throne, now advancing, now retreating, and always the eyes of the dusk figure holding the crown of thorns, burned and blazed, though it made no movement of invitation.

No sound came, but Selene was somehow aware of the words: "Enter in. The kingdom is ready. It is the kingdom of soul and sense." She was conscious, too, of a mad yearning to sit in the seat and wear the crown of thorns.

pressing them down until they dripped afresh with her blood. The lights grew and strengthened. All the intolerable splendors pressed upon her, almost overwhelming her. She could not take away her eyes, but lay trembling, panting, wild to spring up and claim the crown, yet somehow mysteriously withheld. The transparent otherself began to fade, to draw back, as though coming into herself. She gave a little cry, and raised her eyes to the dark, hovering figure. It stood now for the first time full in the flooding light. It smiled grimly; its eyes were full of brooding fire. They seemed to pierce her very soul, to draw her in spite of herself, away from life, from earth, from comprehension. Looking into them she gave a wild scream. In their fire she had at last recognized the soul of her lover, Earle Brewster.

The shrill cry broke her trance. She sprang up in bed, and put out her arms imploringly. For a minute she could not breathe, could not speak, could not even shape a mental prayer. Her face ran cold sweat, her hands were clinched, every nerve and muscle in her vibrating as in the relaxing of deadly strain.

She fell back on the pillow sobbing wildly. "Earle! Earle!" she moaned. "You called me! I tried to come. I do not dread the crown of thorns if you plant them on my brow. O, my love, my life, what does it mean? What can it mean?"

CHAPTER VI.

A man who prevails against any set foe is often conquered by his environment. Earle Brewster had in large measure the instinct of dominance, of leadership. He felt, and truly, that no man, no aggregation of men, indeed, in all Barcelona could stand successfully against him. In local matters he spoke, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast. This was partly by inheritance. His father had virtually held the town in the hollow of his hand. The son had been wise enough to recognize very early in his career that the indispensable condition of continuing leadership is the ability to direct the current of prevailing impulse rather than to contravene it.

That is to say, he knew that Barcelona accepted him, deferred to him, chiefly because of this unspoken, intuitive conviction that Barcelona at bottom controlled him. He was its strongest man intellectually, financially, politically, yet his strength was as weakness compared to the might of its own mass. It had a subdued yet solid pride in his riches, his attainments, his social eminence, even his necessary frailties—the decent and well-masked transgressions of a gentleman. He was a sort of radical sign, expressing to the commonwealth at large the type of Barcelona's achievements and civilization.

Self love in the sense of small vanities, he had none. But he did love very dearly the quality of consequence he perceived in himself. Until he fell under Selene's sway it had been the keenest and most vital of his emotions—all the more keen and vital that it was unacknowledged. He found himself now in a curious, an irritating position. Fate had precipitated a crisis, and he was inadequate. A better man, or a worse, would have met and mastered it.

He loved Selene so madly, so entirely, the bare thought of life without her was appalling desolation. But how bring her into his life, held and bound as he was to the living and dead! His mother, he knew, would not openly break with him, but she would draw aside, and look unutterable things in a fashion entirely maddening. Then there was his little child! A girl, he held, was very largely what her home made her. He had no right to give this girl an atmosphere of frost, and heart-burnings, and perpetual silent strife. Clearly, he was answerable to his child, even more than to his mother—or even to her mother.

Her mother! He always stopped there in his tumultuous meditations. The dead woman's eyes seemed to swim before him—the mouth he remembered so well to smile whimsical scorn. He could feel the thought back of them—satiric thought—of his perfidy. Constance had not been of an exalted soul, but she had read

human nature shrewdly, especially masculine human nature. Even when he made her the promise she had smiled—as she smiled in his mind now—and said, faintly: “I am sure you will keep that—at least six months.”

Outside his family was his world. There he must face open revolt. Selene would never fit into it. Her nature, like her figure, was too large, and simple, and freely natural, to submit to the crampings of its narrow conventions. For, though the great world has its conventions—they are, indeed, as widespread as the human race—those conventions are airy and elastic compared with the rigid regulations of aspiring provincial places. Selene had been always in Barcelona, but not of it. She was past the formative stage now, and though she did not wholly lack adaptation, it was idle to hope that she could so far change herself as to accept its straight restrictions and devious enlargements.

Barcelona likewise would be as far from accepting her. More, it would resent bitterly her elevation to the ranks of its leaders. Politically, it was, as a community, intensely republican, but the republicanism stopped short of social life. There, if lines of class and caste lacked open and verbal recognition, they were, none the less, strictly drawn and maintained. True, the lines ran sinuously. It would have puzzled the keenest student of social conditions to say why they included certain indi-

viduals, and left others—to the casual lay mind much more desirable—out in the cold. Money, though a very considerable factor, was not indispensable, any more than it was a talisman—an open sesame.

Selene was of the excluded—just why nobody could say. Her mother had been a farmer's daughter, her father a promising young inventor. Both had died when she was a tiny child, leaving her to the care of John Barber and his mother. By birth and blood the Barbers were entitled to hold up their heads with the best, yet, what with bereavement and misfortune, they had let themselves get in a way of being overlooked. Though town gossip was keenly cognizant of them and their affairs, the town's invitation lists knew them not. John's marriage had evoked comment enough—his death so quickly following—something approaching sympathy for those he left behind. Out of the sympathy, and certain nebulous stirring in the breasts of their fellow parishioners in St. Ignatius, there had come the offer of the place at the library. Selene had taken it when her year of mourning ended, all unconscious that in the taking she had put herself farther than ever outside the social pale. It set her, indeed, very near the level of the mill girls, who were well understood to be nearly on a par with Barcelona's kitchen maids.

All these things and many more seethed

through Earle Brewster's brain as he tossed and writhed in bed on the night after he had left Selene. He was not a profane man, yet for hours he muttered curses—upon life and life's hamperings of circumstances. He could see no clean way out—yet such a way there must be. As the city clocks struck four he clinched his hands, crying out: "Damn it! I will have her! She is mine! She shall stay mine. The whole world shall know it before another night!"

Just then someone rapped violently on his door—Perkins, his little girl's nurse, called through it: "If you please, Mr. Brewster, madam, your mother, has a bad turn. She says will you please get up. I have already sent for the doctor."

"It is my heart, Earle—I have been afraid of it this long time," his mother said, brokenly, when he had rushed to her bedside. "No, there is no danger—now," answering the question in his eyes. "I am better, but I do not want another attack—if a doctor can keep me from it."

Soon the doctor came bustling in—keen-eyed and cold under a suave, professional exterior. After half an hour, which had seemed to Earle a year, the doctor drew him aside to say: "So far the mischief is not serious. The danger lies in a recurrence of the attack. If we can guard against that for a couple of years there will be no danger at all. You must keep your mother quiet and tranquil. Any exertion,

any excitement, may cost her her life, or, if not that, her health. Once let this functional weakness of the heart become well established and she will live in the very shadow of death."

Earle nodded silently, his lips compressed to a bloodless line. The doctor went on: "In such cases care is much more than medicine—in fact, it is the only medicine worth mention. I have prescribed a mild tonic and light exercise. After a little I advise change of scene. Nothing violent, you understand—a little journey by easy stages and, if possible, in the society of friends."

Again Earle nodded. He felt the toils tightening about him. It was his mother against his sweetheart—life against love. All his life he had been imperiously spoiled, impatient of delay, overriding whatever came between him and his momentary desire. He could no more change his emotional constitution than a leopard can change his spots. Though he was not unfilial, he had never felt for his mother the absorbingly tender devotion that is the true crown of motherhood. He loved her with a sedate, respectful fondness, that would make her loss a pain, yet miss her scarcely a month. What he did love supremely was his ideal of himself. The ideal would suffer irretrievably if, by any action of its flesh and blood simulacrum, his mother came to harm.

All this lay inarticulate in his consciousness as he bowed the doctor away. He had said,

speaking evenly, with just a shade of hardness: "Depend on it, your patient shall be guarded more vigilantly than I would guard my own life."

Then he flung himself down upon the sofa in the hall outside her door and slept heavily until the sun was high. It was almost noon, in fact, when he awoke and sat up rubbing his eyes. Voices came to him from within—his mother's speaking in almost the usual strength, and Mrs. Witherby's running nimbly along the whole gamut of town gossip.

"I assure you it is quite true," she was saying. "That Barber creature is dangerous—the sooner she is forced to leave Barcelona the better for all of us. As long as she was content to be nobody I tolerated, I even encouraged her, for that poor old mother-in-law's sake. You know I have very few mistakes upon my conscience, but I made one almost criminal when I let her appear in the Procession. Earle is partly to blame for that—he insisted there was something oriental in her look. Because the stage setting was so handsome and people insisted upon seeing her three times, she has grown quite insufferable. My dear, it would make you ill to see her airs and graces, not to mention her clothes. It is positively impious the way she sets herself up above the fashions. Why, she told me the other day she would rather wear what was becoming than what was stylish. Did you ever

hear such vanity? Setting her own looks against the dictates of progress? And even that is not the worst. I saw Squire Waite as I came on. He says when he went last night to give her notice she was entertaining company in the parlor—some factory hand, I dare say—and came out to see him with some white thing on, long and full, and tagged about, with hanging sleeves, and he couldn't for his life say whether it was a wrapper or a nightgown. He quite agrees with me that we cannot be rid of her too quickly if the church is to be kept pure and the young saved from evil example."

"You are too hard on her, I think," Mrs. Brewster said, more mildly. "There is nothing worse about the woman—at least, in my opinion—than underbreeding, and for that she is hardly answerable. She does not, I admit, fit into our life here. If I might advise her it would be to go to a city. She has, I think, something of what are called Bohemian instincts. She would, I dare say, be better off and ever so much happier among people of her own kind."

Earle dropped down, pretending to sleep again, his hands clenching hard. Every word had struck upon the raw. What these two said all his world would say, magnified a hundred fold. He would have been more hopeful had his mother joined fully in Mrs. Witherby's railing. She might recover from a prejudice and pass from anger into admiration, but noth-

ing under heaven, neither time nor tide, nor earthquake, he well knew, could ever move her from a position of tolerant and excusing patronage once she had assumed it.

Presently his little daughter came pattering by. She stopped at sight of his figure, recumbent and disheveled, and said, in an accent of serene contempt: "Papa is disgusting—asleep all in a lump. I did not know he could look so common."

It was the last straw. He got up and fled precipitately to his own room. Two hours later, refreshed by bath and breakfast, with a flower in the button hole of his handsome top coat, he sprang into his light carriage and drove away, seemingly a gallant and an enviable figure, yet with that in his heart and oppressing his brain which might have made the poorest contented man feel him an object of pity.

He drove far and fast—out into the bleak country, unlovely in the raggedness of the first spring thaw. In the calendar March was a spring month, but Barcelona could always count upon it for a supplemental winter. The month was nearly past. Until that day it had given no hint of mildness. Sunrise had brought a southerly wind; before noon the sky was overcast, yet the roadside ditches ran brimful, every patch of bare earth had become a muddy blotch, and the snow banks were turning rapidly to slush.

Brewster drove alone. He had felt that even the groom's silent presence would harass him. He sent his horses straight in the teeth of the wind and went at a slapping pace until he noticed foam gathering in their flanks. Then he wheeled them about, set his teeth and said through them: "It is the only way. It must, it shall come to pass!"

CHAPTER VII.

"Sweetheart, sweetheart, tell me that you missed me!—that your soul cried out for me day and night, even as mine did for you!"

Earle Brewster said it, kissing Selene between every word. He held her in his arms, her face upon his breast, her eyes, full of the softest, happy light, looking up into his. Again and again he strained her to his heart, murmuring in her ear: "Sweetheart! Rose of love! Say you cannot live without me!"

"I had to live without you—a whole, long week," Selene said, gently; "but do not think I reproach you!" she hurried on. "I heard—Dr. Ware told me—about your mother. You were right to stay close so long as she needed you."

"Nobody can ever need me as I need you," Earle answered. "O, my sweetheart, it is cruel, piteously cruel, for any human creature to be so bound up in another as I find myself in you."

"You are quite sure?" Selene asked, the note of interrogation drowned in happy confidence. She was thrilling through and through—adrift on a flood of ecstasy that swept her beyond connected thought or purpose. She was certain of only one thing—that was, she was alive to her finger tips with the vital pulsings of

love. Doubts, misgivings, apprehensions, all had fled far away at the sound of his voice. She had waited tensely throughout the seven days, feeding her heart upon husks of memory and wheat of full trust. Now that the trust was justified she did not try to weigh and reason—she was quite content to love.

“I am sure—of everything,” Earle said, confidently, almost, she thought, defiantly, flinging up his head. “Sure, we love each other; sure, we were made for each other; surest, we can—never marry each other.”

Selene slipped heavily from his hold and fell prone upon the floor, almost at his feet. As he knelt beside her trying to raise her to his bosom she shrank from him, moaning faintly and putting her hands over her eyes. “Say that again—please,” she whispered after a little. “I want to be sure I heard it—right.”

“We can never be husband and wife,” Earle repeatedly, doggedly. “But what of that? Marriage is for life—love like ours is for eternity.”

“I know I am not good enough, or beautiful enough for you,” Selene said, tears raining over her face, her bosom heaving with a choking sob. “Nobody is quite that—but—but—it was cruel in you to—to make me believe you felt so.”

“Good enough! God! Selene, sweetheart! Do you not know you are too good, too grand, too beautiful for me—for any man that ever lived?” Brewster cried. “It is not that—you

must know—you must have known all along how it is with me. — I am not free. I have made a promise to the dead. As the law has it, I am held in mortmain—”

Selene broke from his hold and covered her face with her hands. He was silent, breathing heavily after that break in his speech. “Be a little reasonable, sweetheart,” he hurried on. “You cannot dream that I shall ever give you up—for anything dead or living. I need you! God alone knows how bitterly. The manhood in me cries out for you, your softness, your sweet eyes—ah, how sweet they are!—all—all your glorious womanhood as its own complement. You must be mine! You shall! If you will not give me my sweetheart, I shall go mad.”

“You are mad already,” Selene said, weeping bitterly. “O, what have I ever done? What have you ever seen in me that you should say in one breath ‘you cannot marry me’ and in the next ‘you shall be mine?’ ”

“You have done nothing but be your own sweet self—the fairest woman under the sun,” Earle cried, catching her to him in spite of her. “O, sweetheart,” he hurried on. “Hear reason—or reasoned unreason! Listen and you will not try to gainsay me. There is no taking back a promise from the dead. Answer me now, on your soul, have you never thought of this thing which stands between?”

“I thought life was stronger than death—

and love than both," Selene whispered. "If it seemed dark, I trusted you—you could make it all light, my heart said. Even when mother tried to warn me, I would not hear a word. Forgive me if I am wrong—but it seemed to me, if this promise was so sacred, so inviolable, it must have stood between us and any words of love. Answer me—is that dead woman still supreme in your soul? Is it only the mortal, the material man, that has come to me whispering a love of the flesh only?"

"No! A hundred times no!" Brewster cried; then, a little thoughtfully, "I loved my wife madly—until she was my wife. After that there was a change. We seemed to grow together, yet apart. I cannot hope to make you understand it, but today I love her memory devoutly—next to you, my sweetheart—yet if she were living here in the flesh I should infallibly hate her."

"She did not love you—she would never have left you bound and lonely," Selene cried, a little spitefully. Brewster laughed, rather grimly. "She loved me. I am certain of that," he said; "but it was with a possessive love. She never cared what I did—it would not in the least have disturbed her to know I had a sweetheart, but she wanted the world to recognize me as hers for all time. I have thought sometimes that she loved me with all her soul and almost hated me with her body."

Selene was crying quietly. Brewster lifted

her face and wiped away the tears, saying: "Sweetheart, you love me, body and soul—even as I love you. To win you, if need be, I could defy death, and the world, and the devil. But since you love me, you will help me over a hard place by seeing the stones and pitfalls clearly and not thrusting me into them. Even if I were free, there are many reasons why an open union is impossible. I cannot murder my mother. To make you my wife would be the same as to put a knife in her heart. Then you yourself—do you think I have no care to see you happy? I must live in Barcelona. Fate has tied me here. If you came into my life the atmosphere of it would stifle you. You were born for the open, for sunshine, for love and happiness. It is hard enough for me, with all a man's outlets and distractions, to bear this cramped and narrowing social atmosphere. You, who are a hundred times more generous of mold and impulse, would fit into the cage I should have to set you in about as a wild dove would fit a canary's brazen prison. If only you will be brave, and strong, and trustful, we may make for ourselves a little foretaste of heaven. We can love, live, die for each other, and our world be no whit the wiser. Say that it shall be so, sweetheart! We can be happy, so happy, it would be sinful to put it aside."

Selene got up unsteadily. In a mocking flash there came to her a happening for the

day. A mill girl had by mistake got out a volume of Shakespeare. In the noon recess she ran in with it, her face a very moral of disgust, to say, as she slammed the book down open upon the desk: "I thought you had only decent works here. Look at that?" with her stubbed finger indicating a couplet on the page of a historical play. It was Elizabeth Woodville's speech in answer to King Edward's rough wooing—

"Although I am too low to be your queen,
I'm much too high to be your concubine."

She had taken the book, with a sort of dull impatience, and replaced it with a well-thumbed romance. The girl's mutterings had worn upon her nerves. Now, in letters of fire, the woman's answer stood out upon the page of memory. Almost unconsciously she repeated it aloud. As Earle caught the import of the words he frowned heavily.

"Listen to me—and reason, Selene," he said, standing up straight and inflexible before her. "This is no question of that kind. You know that as well as I. But look things squarely in the face. We love each other. Granted? You nod your head. If we separate the result is—misery. If we marry, the result is greater misery—if greater misery there can be. I have not spoken this thing lightly. My God! Do you think if there were any other way I would have risked bringing even one tear to your

eyes? Give me yourself, your precious self, and no wife ever had a husband half so true as I will prove myself to be to the queen of my heart—”

Selene, too, had risen. Now she moved away, like one stunned. He stopped short and caught her hand, asking: “What does that mean? You are not going to leave me?”

“Yes!” she said, simply. “And I think I—I will say good-bye now. Tomorrow is my last day—with the books, you know—after that we—I think we shall go away.”

“Where?” Earle demanded, catching her hands and holding her fast. “I am not quite sure,” Selene said, still speaking in that stunned whisper. “The world is very big. I—I hope we shall find a place somewhere in it—and work.”

“Work! Selene! Sweetheart! Do you dream how you torture me?” Earle cried, catching her in his arms. “You work, my queen, while I loll in idle plenty? Selene, Selene, if for nothing else, for your own sake stay and let me take care of you, and your life shall be one of luxury and ease.”

“The world is not full of ravening wolves,” Selene said, with a wan smile.

“No—but of men—which are very much the same,” Earle said, impatiently. “Of men who will look on you to lust after you, depend on that, Selene—of men who will scruple at nothing to bend you to their wills. You—you

would tempt a St. Anthony, when you have that meek, appealing look, or when you fling up your head imperially, as though bidding Fate to do its worst. Take me, sweetheart, if for nothing but your watch dog. No wolf shall come near you while I am on guard. You are not wanton, nor vain by nature; you do not crave show and glitter. Let me make your life a long dream of quiet and beauty. O! it can be done and the big, prying world none the wiser. You shall stand before it as spotless as the snow."

"That signifies nothing," Selene said, proudly. "If—if I could bring myself to be—to do what you ask, it would be, not for what you could give me, or save me from—but only because I love you so."

"O, what a wicked, wicked sweetheart! She wants to make out that I am one of the wolves. I have not gone down into hell itself and wrestled with twice seven devils because I love her a hundred times too well to leave her. O, no! It is just because I am a man—and am in the ravening mood."

"I did not say that," Selene said, slowly; "but there is truth in it, even if I did not. You think you will always love me—that I grant. You think, honestly, that you will keep me in honor, and hold me as high as good, pure women deserve to be held. But I fear, I fear, I know you best. It is desire which speaks now. Once you had tired of me, once you had seen a fresher face—"

"Hush! I will not hear treason," he said, again catching her to him. "Sweetheart! My own beloved! Nothing could ever make you less to me than the noblest, the queenliest, the loveliest woman under the sun. Love and all that springs from it is pure. I ask you to be mine because of love. God made us male and female. That which he set it in our hearts and bodies to do can be no transgression of his universal law. It is not much I ask—only that you will let me love you, let me shield and shelter and guard you. O, my own! I did not dream you could be so hard. You are like the sharp flints, only all my edged words can strike in you no spark of fire."

"How wise you are," Selene said, smiling and clutching her breast. She had gone suddenly white. A keen physical ache stabbed her heart like a knife-thrust. She staggered to a chair and sat heavily down. Brewster knelt beside her, stroking her hands and showering endearing epithets upon her.

"Selene, Selene! I did not dream it went so hard," he said, contritely; "but, darling, I cannot give up my sweetheart. Maybe I am cruel—but what will a man not do for—more than his life?"

Selene's sobs had ceased suddenly. Her tears dried up. She sat upright, and looked about her, her cheeks a deep, glowing scarlet. "Tell me exactly what you want," she whis-

pered, shrinking, and turning away her face as he put out his arms. "Nothing much—only you," he said, trying to take her in his arms. She got up and waved him back. "You ought to go away—quick!" she said. "This—this cannot be decided all in a minute. We both feel too much now. Go—and do not come again until I send for you."

"Impossible!" Brewster said, confidently, walking a step away. He was trembling all over, more shaken, even, than Selene. "I cannot wait for happiness," he said; "at least, not until I am sure of it. Only give me your promise, sweetheart, and you will see how good and patient I can be."

"Go away—please!" Selene repeated. "I cannot think—only feel, while you are here."

"I am glad. I want you to feel—to feel the same leaping love that tears and rends me," Brewster said. "My darling! O, my darling! You may be right to hesitate, but for my sake be wrong, grandly, magnificently wrong."

"For you I would dare anything—except to lose your love," Selene whispered, with her arms about his neck. "I would give you myself—ah, how gladly, if it were not for the knowledge that in time you would come to hate me for the gift."

"The risk shall all be mine," he cried, straining her against his breast. Then he let her go so suddenly she almost staggered, and turned away, with a quick shiver, his hands

clenching hard. Selene looked at him with infinite compassion. She, too, was shaken as a reed in wind. She longed, with a wild, immeasurable longing, to fling herself at his feet and say to him she would be his slave, content to lose the whole world if only the losing would give him an instant's pleasure. She had by nature a rare fibre of devotion. She had, too the warmth and fervor of her oriental temperament. She was of the north by birth and ancestry, yet surely in some far eon her soul had steeped itself in the glow of the tropics. Every nerve in her cried aloud its impulse of surrender. This man was her mate, predestined from all time—she yearned to cling to him and say, "My lord, my king, do with thine hand-maiden as seemeth good in thy sight."

Something withheld, something remote, intangible as the fine essence of a flower. It was not a moral scruple—moral scruples she had none in the face of love. It was not instinct, since every primal chord was vibrant with love's impulse. Whatever it was, it moved her to dart to the door, rush through it, and say from the outer side of it:

"If you will come again in three days my answer will be ready."

CHAPTER VIII.

Three days later Earle Brewster stood awaiting Selene, his face as white and set as though it showed beneath a coffin lid. His eyes were twin fires in cavernous depths. Throughout the three days he had scarcely eaten or slept. There were haggard lines all about the insolently handsome mouth. He stood stock still save for a nervous clinching of the hands in the ambush of folded arms.

Truly the pains of hell had hold upon him. Pride, dominance, desire, each roused to the highest pitch by this unlooked for delay, combined to make him emotionally a figure of fury. Outwardly he was as one frozen. His mother had looked at him with something like awe that day, and his little child, in spite of childhood's unknowing courage, had shrunk from him in passing, and said to her nurse: "Papa is an o-gre," with great stress on the word. "We will leave him to be eaten by the lions when they come."

There was something decidedly ogreish in the gleam that lit his countenance when at last Selene stood before him. "You do not love me half as you love to torment me—" he began, but stopped short, stayed by her face of woe, her hanging, listless hands, her drooping figure. With a rush he caught her in his arms

and covered her face with wild kisses. "Sweetheart!" he said, crushing her so he could feel her tremors, "Forgive me! Do forgive me! But I am not a patient man. I can be less so than ever now that I see you suffer, even as I."

"Not even as you," Selene said, gently. "You suffer to destroy this beautiful love of ours—I in the hope to save it."

"What do you mean? O, you can never intend to stand out against me! Sweetheart! Be kind and say I may kill you—and myself rather than that. Death is infinitely sweeter than the thought of life without each other."

"I know it," Selene said, still gently, swaying a little as she loosed herself from his hold. "If I had been a coward, Earle, you would have found me dead. It is because I love too much to stain it that I have the courage to try to live on—alone."

"Selene! You do not mean that! You cannot!" Brewster cried, his face blank in its despair. Selene smiled, a sad, patient, little smile.

"I must tell you something," she said; "something that maybe will make it easier for you. I have been searching my heart in all honesty these three days past. We are seldom wholly honest—least of all with our own consciences. I have found out things—even about this love of ours—I thought I knew so well. I do love you, Earle. I shall never love anybody else as well. I had set you so high on

that love—as on a pedestal that put you far, far from common men. Now, though I love you no less, I begin to see my mistake. You say you love me—yet you would destroy me. There is a selfish, possessive element in it that hides from you in the depths of your own desire. You want me—want me very badly—that I devoutly believe—but want me upon your own terms. You would not for my sake defy your world—yet you ask me to defy—the wisdom and the experience of all ages—”

“Stop! I do not care for cold-blooded reasoning,” Earle broke in.

Selene smiled wanly and went on. “There is just this further for me to say: I may be a poor thing—I am, I shall remain, mine own. I should like to be your wife. There would be no happiness comparable to living and striving to make you the man God meant you to be. That man is not a libertine and seducer. Because I love you so I will never, by God’s help, be the means of bringing you so low.”

“I see! You want position, social consequence, hollowness, and sham,” Earle said, bitterly. “You stickle for the outward and visible sign, yet fling away the reality.”

“Is it unreasonable,” Selene asked, “that I should care for—the thing which drives you to ask so much of me? Confess, Earle. The truth can do no harm—if you worked in the mill would you hesitate to marry me?”

“That has nothing whatever to do with it at

all," he said, impatiently; then, with a sudden burst of tenderness, catching her in his arms: "The only thing is—can you, will you, send me away?"

"I must!" Selene said, freeing herself lingeringly from his hold. "Though I am sending my heart, my real life, away. I love you, Earle, too well to let you fail in honor. I love this love of ours—this most precious thing of my life—too dearly to make its memory a hissing and an offense."

"You are right! Selene! Selene! My precious sweetheart!" Earle said, dropping on his knees to kiss her garment's hem. Then he sprang up, put his hand over his eyes, and rushed away like a man distraught.

Selene tottered as he left her. When she heard the door close behind him she fell headlong upon the floor, her eyes set, her hands rigid, her breath coming in quick, convulsive gasps. The fearful strain had told mightily upon her. She was conscious of but one thing—a wish to cry after him: "Come back! Come back! Anything is better than that you leave me!" Her heart, her soul, her pride, were bruised and wounded. She was not without innocent vanities. That is to say, she was wholly a woman. It had been a cruel blow to learn that he whom she so madly worshiped had so great an element of weakness in him. She saw with a strangely logical vision that the keeping of his promise was but a pretext for

the salving of his pride. The sight had been a wholesome bitter. If she had continued to believe him wholly flawless, wholly noble, she could never have withstood his impassioned pleadings.

All the more that she was so vividly conscious of traitors within the fortress of herself. In every fibre she fairly ached to belong to him. She was not a woman of snow, but of flesh and blood, wholly human, therefore intensely lovable. It had been a gallant fight against the besieger, made doubly hard by the enemy within the gates. She had won at fearful cost. After half an hour she got up unsteadily, saying with dry lips: "The sun will rise to-morrow. I wonder if it will seem to shine for me?"

Methodically she moved about, extinguishing the lights, banking the fire, straightening the cushions, and setting the room in its usual careful order. She had a pretty housewifely knack in her finger tips. All she touched seemed to fall naturally into graceful groups and shapings. She had been always too full of housewifely pride in her home. Now there was a touch of sanctity and saving in the care of the homely familiar things.

Presently all was done. She stood in front of the dusky grate with a flaring candle in her hand. Faintly she could hear in the room across the hall Mrs. Barber playing softly upon an old melodeon. It belonged to her youth—

John had loved it when he was a tiny lad, and now, though it was worn and wheezy, his mother still clung to it. Selene always shivered a little at the sound of it. It seemed to her forlorn—almost funereal. So it was played only late at night, when the player fancied herself unheard by ears too engrossed in their own concerns. Over and beyond the cracked notes of it Selene caught the tramp of feet, the occasional clamor of gay voices. April had come in with a sudden spring-like rush, and the streets were full of young people running to and fro.

She set her candle down and took up a picture. It was of Brewster—a handsome cabinet photograph—showing his face in profile. He had brought it to her himself, saying with a half whimsical smile: “I know it is very bad, and not the least a substitute for myself, but at least it will serve to prevent your fancy from constructing a rival to me—an ideal I cannot approach.” Then he picked up a small ragged pastel of Selene herself and said, as he slipped it in his pocket, after surveying it critically: “H—m! Not so much unlike you as it might be, and very much ahead of a staring black and white thing. I believe I can tolerate it—until I can do better. One of these days you shall be painted for me as I desire to have you.”

The melodeon ceased to whine and wheeze. Selene caught up the candle and hurried toward

her own chamber. With her heart wounds raw and bleeding she shrank from even the most sympathetic eye. Once inside the door of her own quiet room, she laid the picture down upon the narrow white bed, knelt and pressed her quivering cheek to it, as one might press a beloved dead thing. "Earle! Earle! You are dead to me!" she moaned, half articulately. "I must bury my dead so I can remember him, not clothed in corruption, but with sinless eyes and strong arms, and a heart palpitant with life and love. Death! Death! You are the one real healer, the true comforter, and may I not ask you to come? You have healed so many heartaches.

" 'All that tread
The earth are but a handful to the tribes
That slumber in its bosom.'

"If you had not healed them—ah, me! I fancy they would have groveled lower and lower. 'The raised spirits that walk in glory' came up through tribulation, even such as that where-with I am troubled."

Very softly she flung up the window. A moon in its last quarter hung low in the east, flooding the whole world with a suffused silver, shining too tender to be called light. It fell over Selene, making a halo about her head. Her loosened hair streamed down upon her white neck and whiter gown like a fringy mourning veil. All about her breathed the fra-

grance of roses—Earle's roses, sent that morning to plead his cause. In the still street below she caught a suddenly moving figure. It was too dim to note more than its outline—her heart did not need even that. She knew. Earle had lingered outside, hoping, praying for recall, or else indeterminate whether to come back of his own motion, swoop down on her in the relaxation following struggle and carry her to his way of thought in spite of herself.

She was glad, so glad, he had not come back. Infallibly she must have yielded. Yet underneath the gladness lay a keen and burning anguish. He had gone. He was lost irrevocably. All the days of her years she must walk alone. Wheeling swiftly, she rushed to the bed and flung herself upon it, sobbing heart-brokenly and moaning between the sobs:

“My God, my God! why hast Thou forsaken me? Give me strength to banish this idol, to cling to and worship only Thee!”

Yet between the supplications she clutched the insensate picture, holding it against her heaving breast as a dying man might clasp the symbol of salvation. Presently she started a little. Just across the street an old woman lay dying. She had fought a good fight, keeping the faith through many discouragements, and now that she was entering into reward, she had begged those about her to sing. To ease her shortening breath all the windows

stood wide—thus Selene heard clearly through the fresh night air:

“As a mother stills her child,
Thou dost hush the tempests wild.
Boisterous winds obey Thy will,
When Thou say’st to them ‘Be still!’
Wondrous Sovereign of the Sea,
Jesus! Saviour! Pilot me!”

Selene ran back to the window and knelt, the tears raining over her shaken face as the song went on:

“When at last I near the shore,
And the fearful breakers roar,
’Twixt me and the peaceful rest,
Then while leaning on Thy breast
May I hear Thee say to me,
‘Fear not; I will pilot thee.’”

Selene listened, her sobs slowly dying. There seemed to come balm of healing in the cool night breeze. For an hour she knelt there, watching the silver suffusion creep and strengthen until all the world lay enchanted, its ugliness, its meanness, its scars and gashes drowned out in the radiance from heaven above. As she watched a strange calm fell on her. Through it she noted with a strange sense of separateness all that had come and gone in that last fateful two months. She had lived and died in them. Death might after all mean rest—not actual physical death, such as had come to succor the sufferer across the street. It had moved her to tears to see through the lighted window the figures crowding about the bed for a last look, a last kiss;

then the swift drawing back, as though to give room to the parting soul; the taking away of the pillows from beneath the dying head—at last, the crossing of the dead hands over the breast, while a man's voice, tremulous with grief, said: "The Lord gave! The Lord hath taken away! Blessed be the name of the Lord!"

"Blessed be the name of the Lord!" Selene echoed, bending her head upon her clasped hands. "Father in heaven! Help! O, help! I am a child bereft and in darkness. You who are love must be love's last refuge from itself."

A benison of tears welled up in her eyes. They seemed to quench the flame in her heart, though the sharp ache remained. Presently she got up and wiped her eyes. The candle was guttering out upon the ledge in front of her old mirror. She extinguished it; then by the moon's rays she gathered the gorgeous roses from out their vase, spread a length of thick white damask over her lap, and began with tender fingers to strip off their scented petals. "I will keep you always," she whispered, now and again, pressing a particularly glowing bud to her lips. "You are the sweetness of the roses. It is the thorns I must throw away."

At dawn she fell heavily asleep, with her face buried in the smother of rose leaves. Her last conscious thought was of those other thorns, that could neither be plucked nor thrown away.

Book Second.

THE MAN WHO DARED.

CHAPTER IX.

SELENE WRITES:

Aboard the F. F. V., June 10th.

After all, instinct led me aright. When the blow came—the blow which shattered my life—my soul yearned with a yearning inexpressible for the solitudes, the silences, the grandeurs of the mountains. Always I had dreamed of them, living there in that teeming town, with the flat, fertile reaches round about it, laughing through summer harvests; chilling, freezing, numbing to every sense in the whiteness of the snow.

We are here—mother and I—speeding, speeding through the heart of the mountains. It seems like a fairy tale running on into actual fairyland. By and by we shall stop. Then, I wonder if the fairyland, whose marvelous beauty has brought my soul its first balm, will grow commonplace and even ugly, after the fashion of the good earth where human presences defile it? But I will not think

about that. Instead, I will feed my eyes, my soul, upon the vistas that loom and pass with the whirring revolutions of our flying wheels.

O! The beauty of them! The wild magnificence! The softness of dim, distant blue valleys! The beetling sternness of near crags, threatening to fall and crush us as we speed along! At least, they seem to threaten. In reality, I know they are far beyond the possibility of harming the peaceful myriads who pass them day by day. I can hardly take my eyes from them. Between every word my glances travel to the flitting splendors outside. Not until night shuts it away shall I dare undertake to set down all that I came hither to record.

Even mother, who sits just beyond me, is drawn a little out of her grief. My darling mother! You have been an angel of succor in this trouble. Travel will be a boon to you, almost as much as to me. All your life you have been shut in by Barcelona confines. It is time you began to learn how much there is in the big world outside. It fills me with pride that is almost pain to see your dim eyes brighten as you note my own absorbed glances and to remember that it is because of me, because of love, rooted in mother love, you have given up your own world, not only uncomplainingly, but gladly, and set out, with me for pilot—such an unskilled pilot!—to find and conquer a new one.

* * * * *

The scenery we are passing oe'rwhelmed my heart, yet I had thought I had infinite capacity to endure beauty. I could only sit silent, thinking: "Dear Lord! Dear Lord! I did not know even you could make anything so supreme." I forgot everything else—all the splendors within were as nothing to the splendors without. Yet they had seemed to my untraveled eyes wonderful indeed. I had thought of long journeying always as something tedious, and confined, full, at the best, of wearing hours. I am finding myself borne as on a magic carpet, where I have only to wish for things and, lo! they appear. It is the apotheosis of mind, and muscle, and money, this gliding rush across the backbone of a continent. I had read of it, to be sure—but reading is pale and tame. It fails altogether to give one the exquisite sensations of my present experience.

Night has come down on us—a silver, moonless night. Here or there, if I looked out, I might catch a massy, looming, black outline, or the white gleam of a star. But I shall not look. In two hours more we shall come to our journey's end. I have persuaded mother to lie down, and shall spend the two hours in setting down faithfully much that has come to pass. In all my life I have never kept a journal. This will not be a journal—only my one confidante, to whose safe and silent keeping I shall confide whatever befalls me that is worth a record. The observation car is al-

most deserted. I shall have it wholly to myself in a very little while. Once more to my dear mother, to hold her hand, and kiss her eyelids down, then I shall come back to begin what I, perhaps, ought to have told my confidante first.

* * * * *

Mother is sleeping like a worn-out child. Her eyes were so heavy she could barely lift them and smile at me. Dear, dear mother! While she is left me I can never account myself wholly desolate.

Somehow I am loath to begin—to turn back those closed pages of my life and transcribe what they contain. After all, it is not much. It might be summed in a sentence: Once upon a time there were two women, and one of them so exceeding sorrowful they fled away together into the friendly wilderness. I wonder—I wonder—if ever there will come for me a day when that would not suffice to tell me the whole story! It is said people live on through blight and heartbreak, and come to age, and wrinkles, and silver hairs. But it is hard to believe it, even with mother before my eyes. She loved and lost, it is true, but her loss was not like mine. She could weep, honoring her dead, with her tears. I must weep because of keeping my dead—he really is dead to me—in the straight path of honor.

Words cannot picture how it hurt—and helped—me that he did not try to see me after

that last night. Of course, there were casual meetings—more than one—where we two passed each other by with only the recognition of slight acquaintance. It was best so—infinately best. But my heart—ah, me! what is the use of trying to recall and put on paper the ache, and longing, and deadly sense of loss that filled all the months between the night he left me and that in which I left him!

Yes! Left him! Understand, O, trusty paper! With you I shall be as honest as if I were the Recording Angel. I do not say my own conscience—we palter with our own consciences quite as though they were persons outside. I dare say, there was never a wrongdoer yet but was able to make, if not a defense, at least a strong plea of extenuating circumstances to the judge sitting within him. I left my home, my old life, all I had ever known, because of Earle Brewster. I could not live in sight of him without him—I would die rather than be his upon his own terms. Over against his passion and his pride I have set my woman's will to keep myself unstained. I love!—God alone can know how I love him! But I will love him, if unwisely, at least, too well, to let love suffer stain.

At first the talk of going affrighted mother; yet in the end she was eager for it—as eager, even, as I. She did not shed one tear when they told her our house was sold—that we could go away from the old life absolutely

free. We have kept only the things we could not bear to part with. I thought they would be very many more, but the little mother showed herself a Spartan. She would not sell the cradle in which John and all her babies had been rocked, but she gave it to a poor young thing, whose sick child had no cradle. It was the same with many other things. "I want them to go where they will carry a blessing and be at home," mother said—and I loved her the more for the saying.

One very odd thing: When it was thought we would have a public sale, Finklen, the old man who buys second-hand stuff, came to me one day, bowing and puffing, and spluttering out something about a chair. It was a particular chair—a dark, high-backed old wooden one. He had a customer who was most anxious to buy it privately. The customer only came out in his talk after I had refused even to let him look our household stuff over. I knew what he wanted; I thought I knew also who wanted it. Earle always made me sit in that old, dark chair—he said it fitted my queenliness—it was a sort of throne. If he had got it, I wonder what he would have done with it? But I shall never, never know. We shall walk apart forever hereafter. The chair I shall keep—it is safely stored, to be sent to me when I am established in the city. No one shall ever sit in it—not even myself. I shall keep it as a sort of shrine at which I may say orisons to my dear, dead love.

We are going to the city—the greatest city of the western world—as soon as summer is over. Hazardous it may seem, yet I have no fear. We have enough money in hand to tide us through the first year—perhaps even the first two. In that time I shall certainly be able to put myself in the way of earning more. We shall live simply, with no straining after that which is beyond us. I am young enough and strong enough to do good work of whatever sort my hands may find to do. Indeed, I must work, if I would escape despair, maybe madness. I am writing sanely enough, but—ah, me!—it is because I dare not let loose the torrent within.

Earle! Earle! You are my first thought and my last! I see your eyes in the light that steals first over my waking moments; your smile in the laugh of the winds at play in the meadows! You are with me all the time—around me, about me—enveloping me with your presence, subtly, yet really. I am yours, yours alone. O, the lonely longing to feel the pressure of your arms, the warmth of your kisses! I think if you came suddenly to me I might almost die of joy.

Stop! O piteous fool! Stop! The man is not worth one heartpang. He let you go, whistled you down the wind of his pride, his position, his world. He is no manly man—he would have taken all at your hands, yet make no sacrifice himself! Think of all that—

then say, if you dare, that you love him still! There is no excuse for him. His promise! Faugh! He offered you what he called the soul of marriage! If that dead woman meant anything, she meant to have him mourn her all his days. With you he would have been excellently consoled, and after you had faded the consoling process would have gone on and on. Men are sophists always in the light of their own hot desires. Be brave, Selene! Look at this man who holds your heart in thrall exactly as he is. It may be bitter, but in the end it may also give you your freedom!

Freedom! O, desolate word! If I were truly free it would be to love and still more to be loved. Earle, my darling boy, I know you, thoroughly, pitilessly—your strength, your weakness—and I love you, perhaps the better because you are no flawless icicle! That is a woman's way. You love me, not as I love you, but with all the strength and fire of your soul. You are held and bound. No man is stronger than his environment. I would not hate you even if I could. People laugh at the line—so trite, so vulgarized—

“ 'Tis better to have loved and lost,
Than never to have loved at all.”

I know it voices a great, an overwhelming truth.

I have burned my ships. Barcelona will never see me again—unless—I was about to

write unless it sees me Earle Brewster's wife, but that is so inconceivable I shall not set it down. Even if I were his wife I feel for him too deeply to wish for such a triumph over the Witherby tribe. Stinging, buzzing insects that they are, I would not have them sting my beloved. If he came to me now—in the morning—with a wedding ring in his hand I would tell him: "Dear, I shall only put it on if you will take me where we may live in joy and peace."

No! Barcelona is behind me. The future? God alone knows. But this I do set down out of a full heart—all that a woman reasonable, capable, reasonably honest, wholly unrestrained, can do to make her way, that I shall do. It is more than a little curious how I have been led thus far upon the way. It was something more than blind yearning for change and beauty, I am sure, which made me set my face to the mountains. How best to reach them I did not certainly know. Three railways run in and out of Barcelona. We had never studied their routes—mother and I—so little had the thought of migration laid hold upon us. But one of them, we knew, led through the Piedmont Valley, around which the mountains lay, and so we are here in the heart of them.

We can be, I think, rather proud of ourselves. Although we are so entirely home-bred provincials, this train, the last word of luxu-

rious travel, has not made us gape and stare. We have accepted it, all its comforts, all its magnificence, quite as though they were commonplaces of our daily life. It makes few stops. It is only as a special favor—won for us, I think, by our entire inexperiencedness—that we are to be put off at our stopping place, a thrifty village in the edge of the mountain-land. Perhaps it would be better if we made our half-way halt in their heart, but somehow I cannot feel easy until I have put their whole rugged barrier between me and—my life.

My life! Selene Barber, the woman Earle Brewster loved, is dead—dead and buried beyond resurrection. This pale walking image of her bears her name and her burdens. Henceforth the image must stand for the reality. The good Lord send that it may always stand firm for the right—the right which the true Selene died for.

I must stop—my heart—poor Selene's heart—is not yet quite dead. It throbs as though it would burst. I can look back no longer. Here on the very verge of the new world I should be able to lay the ghosts of the old, but they haunt me—and madden me almost—with their insidious whispers. "He will come to you! O, never fear! He will come!" is the burden of their chant. Father in heaven! Save me! Spare me that trial! Do not, I pray you, break a bruised reed!

The train is slacking speed—and there is the porter. In a minute I shall be standing—a stranger on strange land. Mother, dearest, one moment! There! Give me your hand! Lean on me—I am strong. Let me close my book, put down my pen—I see a welcoming light outside.

CHAPTER X.

The Edge, June 20th.

Perhaps I am growing fanciful. Mother insists upon it when she hears my name for our village of refuge. It has a commonplace appellation which does not in the least agree with its location. That is wildly beautiful. It sits upon the very eyebrow of a cliff, looking across a narrow mountain valley and down into a winking, dancing stream. So to me it is The Edge—nothing more nor less than the edge of the world, as well as of the mountains. Here they have lost their wild grandeur. Instead, they are a riot of rippling, rounded swells. Semi-occasionally you find crags, and deep glens, and the loveliest, sunflecked tarns. I suppose they must be tarns—that is what all the wild, pretty streams I ever read of in the story books were called. I like our American creeks better—but then it does not sound so romantic. Romance! Faugh! I almost hate the word. It brings up the library and—well—other things that I have determined to forget.

Creeks or tarns, the mountain waters are alive with leaping silver-sided things—trout, I suppose. Especially the water upon which The Edge looks down. We have found shelter in a dwelling that commands almost half its silvery

length. Every day I see men whipping the pools of it and wading in the shallows. They are strangers, I hear—city men—up for the fishing ahead of the general summer rush. They wear rubber boots—the most of them—coming to the hip; carry strangely wonderful things they call creels, and have their hats banded about with leaders and flies. They have what they call split bamboo rods, too. I am beginning to find out something about the aristocracy of sport. In Barcelona, I dare say, our high society indulges in such things, but the fishing that the mass understands is done with cheap and, in the main, home-made tackle. The woman of the house has let me know that The Edge plumes itself no little upon its profitable sportsmen visitors. They beat plain summer boarders hollow, she says. She says, further, than the plain summer boarder is a “main dependence” with many of the farmer folk. “If it wasn’t for the money they fetch in half the places around would be et up with the mortgages,” she tells me. That is another new thing. In Barcelona, try as we may to be up to date, only the very rich or the very sick think of leaving home because of the season.

That is to say, we have not caught the vacation habit. We! It makes me laugh—that we! What’s Barcelona to me, or I to Barcelona, any more? Nothing in the round world. Still, I cannot just yet get out of the habit of speculating about it as though I were still of it.

Henceforth I must learn to do it as a reincarnate spirit might speculate upon former states of existence.

We—mother and I—are very comfortable. And I am safe. What is more essential—we have made good terms for the summer. Coming so early we shall be able to live a month for what the regular vacationers would pay for a fortnight. I am a little curious to watch the August rush. Perhaps it will divert me enough to tone my nerves and make me feel really like work. I certainly hope so. So far I am literally dead—supine and listless, even in the face of the beauty that ought to set me quivering with delight and a desire to fix its evanescent charm. I feel none of the desire. Even the sight of palette and brushes has grown hateful. Still, I go out every morning with my sketch-book. Once I caught the morning spirit and worked away with something of my old fervor. In the middle of it I heard a man speak in the valley below. Something in the *timbre* of his voice recalled Earle. I dropped my book, bowed my head upon my clasped hands, and sobbed—dry, choking, soul-rending sobs—for an hour. And all night long I could not sleep. Through the darkness I saw and heard him so plain I lay palpitant, as though he were coming to kiss and claim me.

Will he ever leave me in peace? It is cruel, now that I have given up everything, to have him haunt me, harry me, day and night. Al-

though I love him so I should be able, at least, to work apart from him. Mother watches over me with a tender, loving patience that should be in itself inspiration. She does not know all the truth—I have told her only that we had agreed a marriage between us was impossible. Dear heart! I would not grieve her delicate gentlewoman's nature so much as to tell her any man rated lower than the best the woman her son saw fit to make his wife. There is something wonderfully touching in her trustful pride in me. She is infinitely sorry for the pain I suffer. Though I do not speak it she reads it in my dark-circled eyes, my pallor, my drooping head—and infinitely glad that I am still her daughter, still John's wife, called by his name.

She counts nothing a sacrifice for me. Only this morning she came to me with a lovely string of old chased gold beads. "John's father gave them to me upon our wedding day," she said. "I hardly ever wore them—you know I was always thin—but they will be beautiful on your round throat. I have kept them to put in the coffin with me, but now I want you to have them, in remembrance of me and my boy."

I shall wear them to please her—what would I not do to please her?—the one human creature who cares whether I live or die, am happy or sorrowful? I must in some way make up to her all I have cost her. It is no little thing for

one to pull one's self out of an accustomed place when one is well past middle age, and go, in blind trust, into strange, new scenes. To-night I am writing, possessed with a fury of action. Any sort of action. I must do something or scream aloud. It is raining outside—soft, pattering, summer rain. In the morning there will be a new heaven, a new earth.

I shall go out into it. I shall take mother with me. And I shall ask her: "Dearest, what is it your wish that we shall do all this summer day? She will smile and demur and hesitate, but I shall carry her off to a fair hillside I have found, where there are ferns in the shadow and daisies in the sun. There I shall establish her on the rocks, like a queen on her throne, and talk to her, and make her tell me stories—stories of John, a baby, a little lad, a big boy, almost a man, begging to go with his father, or, later, to go and fill his father's vacant place.

They are sweet stories, full-flavored with the sweetness of home and love. O, if only I had loved John as I love Earle, how happy I could be to mourn him and cherish his memory all the days of my life! This world is all criss-cross. The worst of it is the way it seems a touch would set it right. If there were no pomps and vanities, neither the desire of the eyes, nor the pride of the flesh, we might come very near to realizing our heaven below.

I must stop. If I go on longer there will

surely come a mood of madness. The wind is rising, the rain tattoo is lulling to the faintest patter, like the sound of fairy footfalls. I wonder if there will ever fall a rain for my parched heart? I wonder—I must stop. Good-night, my confidante! Good-night!

* * * * *

The Edge, June 23d.

The best laid schemes of mice and men go wrong—likewise the best laid schemes of women. It was fair in the morning, as my heart had prophesied; but a rainbow arched the fairness, presage of further showers. In spite of it I set forth upon my outing. The hillside—ah! what words shall paint its cool, green freshness, with raindrops nestling still in the hearts of the flowers and the depths of the grass! The ferns seemed to uncoil their new fronds visibly. All the shady spots waved with them—the mossy ledges seemed heaped with green velvet cushions, regal in their softness. All about the birds sang—not their full-throated fair weather songs, but in fitful choruses of dropping notes.

They knew, those wise birds, the rain was not over. I knew it, too, but just then my mood was too willful to let knowledge lead to wisdom. We set out, with an umbrella between us—a big, tent-like affair I have set up for mother's benefit. We had, beside, our lunch basket, my sketch-book and easel. I begged to leave them behind, but mother in-

sisted they should bear us company until I was forced to give in to her. But waterproofs and overshoes—I would none of. “If we must be lumbered up with them,” I said, “we had better stay indoors.”

I had my reward for that fine piece of folly. Toward eleven o’clock there came the quickest heavy shower. It was a regular thunder gust—a blue-black cloud, veined through with forked lightning, sharp wind, and big, pelting drops falling in thick sheets. It seemed to gather all in a minute around at the back of the hill. We hardly caught the first roll of thunder when it was in sight and between us and shelter. There was nothing for it but to run down hill to the streamside, where there are big, shelving rocks. I knew they would save us from the worst of it—at least they would so far fend off the wind as to make the umbrella avail. So I snatched up mother and scurried down with her, leaving easel and sketch-book to their fate.

Even then we got smartly sprinkled before our haven of refuge was reached. At the very last I slipped, and fell sprawling, but clung desperately to the lunch basket until I was again on my feet. What amazed me was to find myself laughing aloud over my mishap, just as I used to laugh when I fell in the snow-banks on my way to school. Mother looked at me, the gladdest light coming into her eyes. “I am getting my daughter back,” they ap-

peared to say—and so gently I was thoroughly ashamed. Darling mother! You are enough for any mortal's worship! Whither thou goest I will go, whither thou stayest I will stay; thy people shall be my people, and thy God, above all things, my God.

I had just set her snug in the deepest recess of the rocks, and stood holding the umbrella tent to shield her still more, when two men came running toward us—two fishermen, with rods over their shoulders and creels strapped at the waist. I knew who they were—our landlady is better than a city directory. She can tell to a single entity all who come and go in the village. Indeed, she not merely can, but will. The only way to keep from hearing is to run away—and we have not always energy for that. So we are to be pardoned for knowing that the taller of the fishermen was a certain Mr. Deering, who hailed from New York City, whose business was indeterminate, but who was known to have a deal more money than he put to wholly good uses. As, for instance, he was supposed to be sporty, from the fact that he had incited the village lads to get up a cock fight and wagered ten dollars even on the result. As he backed both competitors it did not seem to me he was taking an undue advantage. Still, I had not said so—my landlady's scruples are things one does not wilfully tread on when once one knows their strength. Mr. Deering's companion was also a New

Yorker, and reported to be an artist in search of health and the picturesque.

His name was Bricknell. Deering had a way of shortening it to Brick. The Edge had adopted the same fashion, until the real name appeared only at the postoffice. I had encountered Brick more than once in the course of my strolls, but so far we had preserved that affectation of ignorance regarding each other's existence that is demanded by the proprieties of semi-rural American life. The real ruralist is, I have found, always full of good-fellowship and ready to recognize a fellow-creature in anything human. There are, I find, many points in common between the extremes of society. The very high and the very low are equally approachable. It is those between who are so fearful for their gentility they put up in their faces a moral "Keep Off the Grass" sign.

I am wandering. As Brick caught sight of me he touched Deering's arm significantly and said under his breath: "There! You see, I was right! I have found, not the lost arms of the Venus de Milo, but the Venus herself, in flesh and blood."

He never meant me to hear him. Perhaps he thought the storm would drown his voice; perhaps, also, the rocks have the conformation of a whispering gallery. However that may be, I felt myself redden furiously. For my life I could not help it. Deering had glanced

at me. It was a glance that stung like a whip-lash. I caught myself repeating inly what Earle had said to me—men would look on me to lust after me. I swung a little about so as to interpose the umbrella between us, but had to change my position, as the rain was dashing in wildly. Mother should be sheltered from it, as she in turn should shelter me from the insult of that man's eyes. I spoke to her, in a low tone, asking if she were comfortable and bidding her not to be afraid. The place where I stood was almost in the water's edge. With dismay I saw the stream coming nearer and nearer. The rain was so torrential if it lasted half an hour the brook would be in flood.

For myself, I did not care. It was another thing about mother. She is so frail, like a piece of old porcelain, I trembled at the thought of a drenching for her. High up in the rocks there was a dry niche. If only she could clamber into it she would be safe. I measured the distance with my eye, then looked down at her. It was hopeless, I saw, for her to make the effort. I had resigned myself to the inevitable, when Deering said at my elbow: "Excuse me—but storms do not let one stand on ceremony. Mrs. Barber, if you will allow me, myself and my friend can put your mother up there where she will keep dry."

"If you will do it I shall thank you very much," I said. He smiled at me—he has, cer-

tainly, a winning smile. Brick was already scrambling up the rocks. In a minute he stood firm, reaching down his arms. "Don't be afraid, ma'am! Deering can lift you like a baby, and I—oh, I'm ever so much stronger than I look," he said, cheerily. Deering smiled again, and nodded; then picked up mother and held her higher than his breast, as lightly and as tenderly as I might hold a little frightened child! Brick caught her and set her in a natural arm chair of rocks. "Now let it rain all it pleases!" he called down to us, standing beside her. "You two strong ones need not mind it—and we are safe," turning to mother with a bright smile, as he sat down at her feet.

"Shall I not help you up, too?" Deering asked, holding out his arms tentatively. I shook my head. "There is no room," I said. "Besides, now that I can have all the umbrella, I shall do very well. But you may pass up the lunch basket. The clouds are thickening so it may have to answer for everybody's dinner."

"Who cares?" he said. "O, but this is jolly! A picnic all our own out in the rain!" Brick shouted down to us as he caught the basket. Deering was measuring the space on the rocks with his eye. "There is room in plenty," he said, at last. "And, really, you will have to get up there. The brook will be running like a mill race where you stand inside the next five minutes."

"I am strong—it will not wash me down," I

said. "As for a wetting, I do not mind that in the least."

"But I cannot let you get a drenching when it is easier to be only damp," he said, smiling and dropping upon one knee. He had on his high boots, so it really did not matter that he knelt in two inches of racing, muddy water. As he looked at it he said, half mournfully: "No more good fishing for three days at least. Those rascals, the trout, will be so gorged with worms they will disdain the handsomest fly that ever was cast."

"What do you want?" I asked, as he looked at me without speaking. He nodded impatiently, saying: "There's your step. Brick, give her a hand! Now, up you go! Otherwise I shall have to scramble up, with you over my shoulder."

"I am not light enough for that," I said. Then, as the water was coming down in boiling waves, I stepped as he had bidden me and found myself safe and snug at mother's elbow. Brick shouted with laughter as Deering leaped up after me. "Oh, oh!" he cried. "I must sketch that scene. The fellows at the Racquet will be wild when I show it there."

"You will do no such thing. Behave, can't you, once in your life?" Deering retorted, then bent down to mother, with a whimsical laugh, saying: "My dear madam, if we were very proper persons we would at once present ourselves in due form to each other; but as we

have been in The Edge ten days each that would be a waste of breath, since, I dare say, each of us is much better informed about the other than we can possibly be about ourselves."

"The ten days make that inevitable," I said. Mother smiled at me and shook her head. But she held out a hand to each of the strangers, saying, in that sweet, old-fashioned way of hers that makes me so proud of her: "At least, I feel sure we know you well enough to ask you to dinner. Mr. Brickwell, please pass me the lunch basket. I dare not trust Selene to open it—she is a headlong child—and I put it up myself ever so carefully, even if I did not know we should have company."

Brick knelt before her holding the basket. We were so crowded there was no place for it—at least, no safe place. He looked up at her with sunny eyes and said, a little hesitatingly, yet with confidence: "I wonder if—you won't mind a fellow's having something to drink?"

"Not a bit, if it is worth drinking," mother said, smiling back at him. "My husband always liked a glass of wine with his dinner, and I have never found out why the abuse of a good thing should forbid its use."

"What a delight you are!" he said, warmly. "I'd give a thousand dollars to hear my mother say the same thing. She thinks, bless her heart, that the devil lurks in every bottle that ever had anything stronger than milk in it.

She even sighs and shakes her head when she thinks about my doctor ordering me to take a glass of sherry once in a while."

"I can vouch for the sherry he is going to offer you, madam," Deering said, nodding toward Brick. "Brick has a good heart—the best in the world almost—but when it comes to a palate for things that require to be exquisite—well, all I can say is that he should pray to be permitted always to choose for his enemies. The sherry in his flask is good, though—the best in this country—genuine Amontillado. Let me beg you two to finish it with me; then you will certainly not be harmed."

"Mrs. Barber—young Mrs. Barber—must not be left out," Brick said, stoutly. Deering laughed, a low, amused laugh. "You leave me out of the count," he said. "I am here to look after young Mrs. Barber. Sherry is a good tonic—for aged and feeble persons. For such as she and myself—what do you say to genuine *eau de vie*?"

He pulled from his breast pocket a flat silver flask, richly chased. The top flew back as he touched a hidden spring, revealing a tiny cut glass drinking cup resting in its recess. This he filled with a fragrant, oily, mellow stuff from within the flask and passed it to me, saying: "You have no doubt drank deep of another water of life—still, you must not disdain this."

I swallowed it, why I hardly know. Instantly my veins began to run warmly, happily, my mouth wreathed itself into smiles. I knew my eyes were sparkling, my cheeks two damask roses. I caught mother's eyes full of gentle wonder, touched a little with alarm. They made me smile as I had not smiled since that night when I died. The liquor had not gone to my head. It was as steady, as sane, as head could be. Mysteriously it had reached some secret spring of the soul and set forces working that had been clogged and dumb."

We ate, huddled there, the rain dashing impotently under our rock roof. The food was ambrosial. As we ate I laughed and chatted with the strangers as I have seldom done with my nearest friends. Deering kept his eyes fast upon me. I felt the looks but no longer resented them. I was in a mood to defy life and the world and Fate. The rest seemed in a degree responsive to it, even my gentle mother. We were so absorbed in ourselves we forgot everything else. It came with a shock of sharp surprise when mother said, looking across the creek, "Why, the rain is over! See, the sun is shining as bright as ever."

CHAPTER XI.

The Edge, June 29th.

My birthday has passed—I am turned into my thirtieth year. From what is in my heart I might be a hundred. God send I may never see such another as that birthday, now three days back. Oh, it was cruel! Fate might have chosen some other time for her last fell blow. Ever since I had only strength to murmur, “All Thy waves and Thy billows have gone over me!”

Earle came to me—Earle, my lover, more than ever my lover—wild with love and loss. Heavens! It makes me shudder even while I thrill to recall the mad longing, the desperate hunger in his eyes. He came on me unawares. That was not wholly kind. I know he thought to surprise me with my guard down, and so, maybe, to win an easy victory.

All day I had been restless and singularly depressed. I had stolen away from them all. Since our adventure in the rain Deering and poor Brick have fallen into the friendliest intimacy with us. Mother smiles approval of them, and I do not wonder at it. They treat her like a queen upon her throne. But I am not a princess regnant nor even potential. They have developed in me an element of good fellowship which is a surprise to myself. Of

course, their good fellowship is touched the least bit in the world with gallantry, but so delicately one must be wholly flattered by it. Still, upon my birthday everything human wore upon me. I wanted silence and the hills. I stole away to them for comfort. There is a rocky, shady peak some little way back of my favorite hillside from which one can look all up and down the valley and on to the railway. There I hid myself at the foot of a tall pine lying prone on the carpet of clean, brown, sweet-smelling needles and staring at the little blue dots of sky I caught through the network of branches.

I heard no word, no sound, even. Suddenly someone knelt beside me, caught me as though he would never let me go, and kissed, kissed, kissed me, crushing me the while in a breathless embrace. Oh, the heaven of that minute! Heaven! Maybe I am sacrilegious, but I doubt if waking to find myself in the mansions of the blest would have so filled and flooded my soul with pure, quick-leaping bliss.

At last Earle let me go, only to snatch me again to his heart and say huskily: "Selene! My sweetheart! Are you not sufficiently punished for this wickedness you have wrought?"

I did not answer him; I dared not let him hear the gladness in my voice. He had come! It must be he who had repented. He would never, never leave me. I should never again know the lonely, intolerable ache of empty

arms and empty heart. I drew away from him gently, smiling at him and putting out my hand in signal that he must sit quiet at a little distance.

"I am glad, so glad to see you," I said, at last. To my own ears my voice was vibrant. He started painfully as I spoke. "Are you only glad?" he asked, a little resentfully. "Glad, Oh, Selene! Sweetheart! I have come to you across the very gulfs of hell."

For the first time I looked narrowly at him. His face was drawn and white, his eyes blazing. He moved nearer and said, not offering to touch me: "Oh, my sweetheart, you have brought me to a pass I thought no human creature ever could. I have come to entreat you, to besiege you, to compel you, if I must, to take back that cruel, that senseless cruel decision. Be mine! You must! You shall not make all the sacrifices. I am willing, anxious to meet you half way. Say you will give me your sweet self and henceforth both of us shall be dead to our worlds. I have it all arranged; that is what has kept me so long from your side. Give me your promise and we can disappear, with no harm, no hurt to a living soul. I have here in my pocket that which represents ready money enough to keep us in modest luxury so long as we shall live. Other things are all arranged. My mother will not suffer; my child will go into safe hands. I am giving up all my world for you."

"No; it is for your own way," I said. "Oh, Earle, my darling. Do you not see how cruel, how desperately cruel all this is? Do you not see that if for this desire you are ready to fling aside all the ties of nature—your mother, your child, your place and station among your home people—I dare not trust myself to it. When the flame of it dies, as die it will, then you will repent—you will find me a burden, a clog, a hindrance. Honor might hold you to me, but the bitterness of death would be as honey compared to that—"

"Still carping; still reasoning!" he broke in, roughly. "Selene, you are one of nature's contradictions. You look like—nay, you are—a real woman, all fire and dew and sweetest sweetness; yet when it comes to the *crux* of things then the woman takes flight. In her stead there is a palterer who never knew a heart-throb. Answer me at once. Will you take me or leave me? By the God, you shall do the one thing or the other! I will not be played with to soothe your hurt pride, your lust for coquetry and conquest!"

"Earle!" It was all I could say. Saying it I flung up my arms, half rose, staggered and fell. The rest is black darkness—a long, black blank it seems to me. I came out of it to find myself in his arms, my head pillowed upon his breast, his fingers stroking my temples, his mouth close to my ear whispering the tenderest entreaties, the most caressing words.

I did not try to push him away. It was beyond me. Strength, woman's pride, self-respect, everything, were for a minute submerged in the flood of my love. There was bliss ineffable in the bare touch of his fingers. I lay inert in his arms, letting him clasp me, as our mother earth may one day clasp me, into rest and peace. I knew it could not last. I knew the struggle was but barely begun. Strength must come to me from some source; why not through the tonic of this exquisite and unnamable joy.

"Sweetheart, speak! Say you forgive me!" he whispered, at last. I opened my eyes and looked full in his face. The glance almost conquered me. I saw in it the ravages of pain and passion. He had aged by ten years since the night of our parting. A woman who stands valiantly against passion, even her own, is almost surely undone when pity cries aloud. It was in my heart to say—indeed, the words were shaping themselves on my lips—"Take me, Earle! I am yours, bound and helpless. Do with me as you choose." But something stayed me.

In the thickets below a bird began to sing, loud and clear and sweet, to his brooding mate on the nest. I knew the song and the singer. I had made friends with the pair of thrushes in the long summer days. And as I heard their love chant a hundred things rushed over me. Here was a pattern for us who call ourselves

the higher creatures. They love as they sing—cleanly, sweetly, purely—centering everything upon the home and the brood.

My heart, storm-swept and passion-wasted though it was, leapt at the thought. This was the love it craved, love open, free, honored in the sight of God and man. No other love would appease it. Better die myself and see my lover die of heartbreak than to do that which would kill the nobility of love and, instead of leading to the heights, sink us both to the eternal depths. Not in my own strength, not for my own sake, but for love's sake, and in love's name again I bade him leave me.

He raved, entreated, almost threatened. The day went by to an evening of storms. At last I rose, utterly worn and wearied. "If you will not part in peace so be it," I said. "It is the last touch of grief to leave you thus in anger, but leave you I must, or I shall surely die."

He caught me to him fiercely and began his mad protest afresh. Just then I heard a footstep on the rocks below. It was already dusky down there in the shadows. Shrubs and tangle hid us. I held up a warning hand. Earle let me go and stepped back, holding out his arms. I lay within them for one brief second, then, as he loosed me, darted away and staggered down the hill. At the foot of it I fell senseless. There Deering found me. Mother had sent him in search of me. She had grown uneasy over my long stay.

When I came to myself he was chaffing my hands vigorously. My mouth was full of brandy from his ever ready flask. He looked down at me kindly, yet his smile was somewhat grim, as he said, nodding lightly toward the hill: "That fellow was pretty hard to get rid of, but I do not believe he will trouble you again."

"Why! What do you know? Did you see?" I began, helplessly. He laughed still grimly, saying, as he helped me to my feet: "Selene Barber, you are the most infantile person—of your size—it has ever been my fortune to meet. Do you think the whole story was not plain at first blush to a man who knows life as I do? I could not help knowing there was a man, a scoundrel, perhaps, behind your presence here, your downcast looks, your fitful temper. You are the sort to be intensely happy—except when the man you happen to love makes you otherwise. Forget him, Selene, unless he is a square-dealing man. No other sort is worth any woman's grieving, let alone spoiling the finest pair of eyes in the world."

"Don't, please!" I said, too crushed and miserable to be more than hurt at his open flattery. He gave me a keener look; then patted my hand, as he might have done a little child's, saying: "There, there. Now let me get you home. I'll improvise a story—maybe it was a

snake that frightened you—which shall let you get off to bed and stay there for a day.”

“It was a snake,” I said, faintly, “the serpent that crawled in Eden.”

He gave a low, comprehending whistle and hurried me home in silence. At the door I fainted again. What he told the others I do not know, but for two days and nights I lay in a darkened room, neither eating nor sleeping, crushed beneath the knowledge that Earle was lost to me forever and that we had parted without a kind word.

CHAPTER XII.

The Edge, August.

No heart to write, O, kindly and patient confidante! The whole world has been a burden for—ah, so long! Since Earle went and took my heart with him six weeks have passed. In retrospect they seem six centuries. Even the healing of the mountains has been in vain.

Yet something happened today which showed me I am not wholly dead. I was sketching, aimlessly, blurring in lights and shadows, trying to catch some of the magnificent aerial distances, when Brick came up behind me. The poor lad has been far from well lately. Though he is exactly my own age and has lived at racing pace, he somehow seems to me very raw and young. Perhaps it is Deering's attitude, or, rather, the reflex of it in my own mind. He rates Brick—always in the kindest fashion—as a big, fond elder brother might rate a wayward youngster of whom he was in truth inordinately proud and fond. Brick takes it beautifully. The two are the best sort of comrades. Brick has told mother many things to Deering's credit—how he had stood by him in illness and trouble, helping around hard places and insisting that he should persevere, when Brick himself was wholly discouraged.

I knew nothing of the boy's presence until I caught his breath, quick and hurried, as he looked over my shoulder. "Oh!" he cried. "Miss Selene, that is magnificent. If only I had your color sense!" Then a little mournfully, as his eyes traveled over me: "Or even half your healthy strength to use what gifts I have. I am just finding them out—in time to be too late. Deering swears at me when I say that, but I am mightily afraid I'm in the right of this. If only I could go back ten years! But there! Whining is no good. I must get better—well, in fact. I *must*. If I do not I shall not be able to look my own ghost in the face."

Then we talked as we had never talked before of art and the life that leads to it and the innermost meanings of it to feeling souls. As we talked I felt almost calm, and when he left me fell to work again with something of my old delight in it. I wonder if it is true that for me salvation that way lies? I am uncertain whether I care to find out or no. These have been wild weeks. I have made a hundred mad plans—to hide in a convent, to go and nurse the plague-stricken, to wrap myself away from the knowledge of all in the obscurity of a drudge! I have said to myself hope was dead, and love, and ambition. It was only in the weariness of actual physical hardship that I could hope for rest.

Work is nature's anodyne; but what work? This dabbling in color has been always the

delight of my soul. Form does not appeal to me; even flowers are but masses of tint. It is the crystal gold of the sunlight, the silver of the moonshine, the soft suffusion of cloudy skies that takes possession of my soul and makes it glad. If I could paint a great picture it would be vague as the Apocalypse, a huge stretch of heights and distances, riotously beautiful with all the hues of light. If only I could do that living might be worth while, after all. When I said as much to Brick the poor fellow's eyes grew wistful, indeed. "Do not talk that way," he entreated. "Indeed, do not, Miss Selene. Living is worth while, anyway, even when you live, as I do, in the very shadow of death."

Poor lad! I understood. He has gone the pace that kills, especially those who have brain and body equally delicately attuned. Tears for him came to my eyes. as he went away. They had not dried when Deering came up. He is never long away from Brick, though I hear from my landlady, of course, that there are urgent pleasures daily calling him. It must be the man has a heart deep and tender or he would not thus comfort and companion a struggling and obscure artist, whose career, I very much fear, is drawing to the end. Deering looked at my wet eyes keenly, then said, in the most humane tone I ever heard from him: "So you, too, have seen the truth. Do you know, if life were purchasable, I would give

half my fortune to gain twenty years for that poor lad?"

"Is it hopeless—his case?" I asked. Deering nodded and said, with a bitter smile: "Quite hopeless. I knew that when we came; but the mountains were his fancy, and I swore he should see them to the end. At first he mended so wonderfully it seemed a miracle was to be wrought. You must see the change of late. To think it is all so little worth while, too. Here is a man the world ought not to spare, dying before his flower—because of a woman's whim."

"So there is a story. I am sorry for him," I said, turning away my face so he could not see how it whitened. He nodded again, almost fiercely, saying: "Yes; but a story I shall not tell you in detail. She is a great lady, with riches, a husband, position, and all that. My lad pleased her fancy of the minute; she led him on and on, kept him dangling about her, until she owned him body and soul. Then, when in a minute of madness, over-encharmed with her subtle alluring, he spoke—well, what all men feel in such cases; she—she turned and slew him with her pretense of outraged innocence and wounded wifely pride. The truth was she had tired of him; besides, she had a newer lover in leash. She is high and haughty, and spotless—before her world. My wife and all the other women follow her lead. She can set a fashion, or ruin a reputation, almost by the waving of her fan."

"Why do you let your wife countenance her?" I asked, looking at him steadily. He broke into a grating laugh.

"Why do I let my wife!" he echoed. "Oh, Selene Barber, I wonder where you have lived always to have kept alive a tradition of wifely obedience! My wife does in all things exactly as she pleases."

"Perhaps you set her the example," I said, looking away from him. He laughed again. "Of course," he said. "There was nothing else to be done in such a case as ours. We had no illusions—I and my bride. Our marriage was a commercial transaction, concluded and conducted with the strictest commercial integrity. I needed her half million of ready cash to save encumbered real estate worth that sum several times over. She needed a fixed position, a husband and an establishment. Her money came out of junk, you see, and she was so close to it it had not been fully disinfected—"

"Please do not speak that way," I said. "It seems to me so cruel. However it may have happened, she is your wife. Any word that touches her must touch you much more closely."

He looked at me amazed. "You *are* a survival," he said, at last, with that same hard laugh. "Perhaps if all women were like you no man would ever speak as I have just done. But do not set me down so much a fool as to

think I speak that way often. I do not, on my life. There is something about you, I cannot understand what, that almost compels a man to speak his inmost thoughts."

"I shall forget what you have spoken, as nearly as I can," I said. "Meantime—about poor Brick—is there nothing whatever that can be done for him?"

"Nothing, except what I am doing—saving him the shame of a bloody end," Deering said, speaking through shut teeth. "I am keeping him here because I know him so well. If once he came to know what I know—that the woman who broke his heart is making herself the scandalous wonder of her world by her almost open *liaison* with Brick's supplanter—well, the world would wake up some fine morning to shudder over a social tragedy. Brick would kill the other fellow, not because he has succeeded, but because he is so low he boasts of his success. My lad would be apt to make a clean job of it—end up by killing himself and the woman, too. When a man has felt in himself all the golden possibilities and knows they are forever gone he is likely to take a desperate revenge on fate."

He left me, shuddering and affrighted in my own soul over the potentialities of human passion.

CHAPTER XIII.

The Edge, August 20th.

The masque of the passions has reached an end—all peace. Today we buried poor Brick under the spreading lindens of the village cemetery. He begged to sleep there—such a pitiful begging!—little broken, gasping words in between the spurts of blood. Deering stood by him to the end. I am almost ready to say now that friends may love and keep faith with a love passing the love of woman. Those two were certainly faithful unto death. And yet—Brick's very last word was a name—"Agnes"—that sent the fire into Deering's eyes.

That was four days back. We waited for his people. Only the mother came. She is a good woman, I am sure, but, oh, how little she must have understood the son who lay so peacefully in his coffin. She was shaken and bowed with grief for him, but it was not wholly the grief of love bereft. There was disappointment and crushed aspiration in what she said to mother: "We always knew he had talent," with her handkerchief to her eyes; "but it would not be so hard to give him up if he had not had such fair prospects opening before him. Only last winter the very richest people in the city took him up. Why, he was paid a thousand dollars for just one portrait.

And the lady who sat for it had said she would make others sit for him. We had built on it so. It is so hard to think we must give it all up because the poor boy had not the strength to stand out against evil ways. Of course, it was the late hours, and the smoking, and—and the drink that did it. What should be done with those who lead young men into such wickedness? Yes, Mr. Deering has been kind, but that does not make up to us. He sent the boy abroad, and there was where our son fell into those dreadful ways.”

Thank God, when I die, there will be none to appraise my loss. It made me sick at heart to hear this woman, who is in her own mind of the very elect, speak so openly, yet so blindly. Yet Deering excused her when I told him of it later. His mouth put on the grim look I have come to know so well, but all he said was: “Well, she shall be consoled. She needs to be, I dare say. They are desperately poor, I know. Brick always shared generously with them whatever he earned. He has left a lot of unfinished things—sketches and studies. It will be easy to see that they are sold at a fair valuation.”

“Which means—that you will buy them, wiping your own claim off the slate,” I said. He looked at me keenly. “Who said I had any claim?” he asked. I nodded: “Brick himself told mother—said the most he cared to live for was to repay you—”

"Don't!" he broke in, turning sharply about. I saw his mouth quiver under his thick mustache. "It is curious," he went on, after a minute, "the effect the lad had on me. It must be he awoke the dormant paternal instinct. I felt almost as if I could be a good man while he was around."

"You are good—in your way," I said. He shook his head. "Not even in my way," he said, "though that is a pretty bad one. Miss Selene, I wonder if I am as much a puzzle to you as you have been from the very first to me? We are both human beings, but that is about all we have in common."

He is a big, fair man, with crisp, blonde hair, and sleepy, heavy-lidded blue eyes. The eyes rested upon me, full of frank questioning at first, but something gathered in their depths which made me turn abruptly away. Of course, it will never get farther than his eyes—that unhappy something which is so distasteful, yet seems to be so inevitable. He is the very pink and pattern of respectful courtesy. Though he may be as bad as he makes himself out, I am certain he will never manifest anything else toward me, unless my own manner should license the change.

I did not answer his question directly. Instead, I said, slowly, weighing my words as I let them fall: "We are certainly unlike in one thing. You married a woman you knew you did not love, because it was to your purpose.

I—well, I have put away love, the most wonderful love in the world, because I could not keep it—unstained.”

“That is to say, you are impracticable—hopelessly so,” he said; then he wheeled and walked away. I did not see him again until he came to walk with mother behind poor Brick to the grave.

It was all very solemn, very touching—the rustic gathering, the old, white-haired minister reading the ritual in a quavering treble, the sough of soft winds in the pines on the hills, the rustle of the linden boughs, and the droning of the humble bees through the plumes of golden rod flaunting all about. Some kindly soul had lined the grave with fresh evergreen boughs, and when it came to be filled the rough fellows at the spades did the work very gently, spreading a thick carpet of soft earth over the boards before they began to let the clods and pebbles rattle down. When the mound was heaped I laid a sheaf of daisies on it. Poor Brick loved them. “They are the constant flowers,” he said to me one day, giving me a choice handful. His mother watched me, a little resentfully I thought, as though she might be thinking, “Here is an intruder who takes up some part of the attention which should center on me, the chief sufferer.” But Deering gave me a grateful look. If that man has a heart poor Brick found the way to it.

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The Edge, June 26th.

Another year, another birthday! I am rising thirty, and I have gone back ten years. This Selene is no gay girl of sweet and twenty, but she has the spring of youth, which is hope.

So much—so much—has come and gone since last I wrote. Odd that I should pen no line in all the months I have been away from this little mountain village; yet not strange, either. In the city one barely lives—it is all so breathless, so absorbing, there is no room for anything more. Mine was the fullest possible life there; the wonder would be if I had snatched time to write of it. Here in the sweet content of the mountains, where for two full weeks I have given myself up to the delight of looking at them, I shall pick up my broken strands and weave from them a connected fabric. All the more connected, perhaps, that I have waited. Things show much more at their true values in perspective.

Perspective! I hate that word. I have a great mind to blot it. I have had it hurled at me in all the moods and tenses—most madly of all by that French water colorist, who raved over the tints of my "Autumn Foliage," but said, holding it upside down, and sidewise, and endwise: "Madame! Ze perspective? Where ees him?"

I must go back to the first of it. Really, though, I think the first has been told. Like the last, almost, it was Deering. For my life

I do not know—I did not even know when it was happening—how it all came about that he fell in the way of looking after me as he had looked after that poor boy—with a difference, however. After the burial he always showed me a dry, wholly impersonal kindness. One day he took a portfolio of my sketches mother had lugged to light, and went through them in the most ultra-critical manner, squinting his eyes, holding them about in different lights, and never saying a word until he had dropped the last one. Then he got up and stretched himself a little. “Young lady, you can make a painter—if you will condescend to learn how,” he said, at last. “What I mean is, your color sense is fine, but you have not the first rudiment of technic. Are you willing to work and wait and watch five years?”

“Ten, if it means learning to do what I have always wanted,” I said. He did not answer me for a full minute. Then he said, thoughtfully:

“I am certain it can be done, but it is going to take grit—real, stubborn grit. I think you have it. What do you say?”

“I do not know,” I answered; “but I am willing to find out by trying.” There the matter rested until next day, when he was ready to go away. He came and talked with mother, not me; but as he left, said, nodding very emphatically: “You are going to hear some news—astonishing news—very soon. Be sure you do not let it overcome you.”

I laughed, and was amazed at myself. Laughing was foreign to my feelings then, on many accounts. But somehow Deering has always affected me morally something as the glass of brandy he made me swallow in the beginning of our acquaintance. For two days mother kept her own counsel. Upon the third there came a telegram, and after she had read it she said: "Our holiday is almost over, Selene. Dear child, do not look alarmed over it, but I commissioned Mr. Deering to find us an apartment in the city. We will go to it next week. He has told me what he thinks of your chances, and I mean that you shall have every advantage."

I did have every advantage. Between them mother and Mr. Deering made me almost ashamed, their kindness was so overwhelming. We were soon comfortably settled in a tiny bird's nest of a place, but trim and dainty and bright as any place could be. How we reveled in the trimness, the brightness, we two wayfarers, who had pictured in our mind's eye life in a flat as a dim and airless existence. And then the delight of making the tiny home express ourselves! No matter what we chose to put in it, we had no fear of Mrs. Grundy before our eyes. In fact, I do not think Mrs. Grundy exists for independent city folk. They are a law unto themselves, so long as they keep within the pale of the health board and police regulations.

My masters! Heavens! If I try to tell of them I shall lose heart for everything else. Mr. Deering chose them. They gave me private lessons. He would have it so. "You are too big, too mature, for the League, for any of the classes," he said. "Besides, you want different training. I know the men who can give it." I am sure they tried as faithfully as ever men did. I must have been a wearing pupil; I can see that myself. I listened to them attentively and tried to profit by every word. But I have found out a queer thing. I am not an old woman, but my muscles have acquired while they were still plastic a trick of responding to a certain mental impulse with a motion which is often the reverse of what I know it should be. That has made the unlearning very hard and my hours of study seasons of grinding labor. But I have not given up. I shall never give up. There is too much at stake.

Love no longer flames the day-star of my soul. In its stead there burns ambition—ambition to set my name high on the roll and let it be read there by the man who would have thrown up his world for me, yet lacked the manliness to brave it.

I have made a beginning. This is my secret, O, best of confidantes! It is shared only with you and one other—my good, bluff, brusque Deering. I have forgotten to tell you the change in him. He has never, by word or look, since I became, after a sort, his protege,

given a sign that he regarded me as a woman. Sometimes his want of difference has hurt me; then I have laughed inly, saying: "Ah, how much better that it is so!" At first I was afraid. But Deering is at bottom manly. Perhaps my very helplessness, the fact that I am so alone, and so forlorn, has put him upon honor regarding me.

He knows of it; he encourages me to hope. I am painting the "Vision of St. John." It has haunted me from my earliest years. If only I can manage to put on canvas one-tenth part of its crowning splendors as they melt and waver before my enchanted eyes, then, indeed, the world will stop to look. I work at it only by fits and starts. The masters? I would not let them set eyes on it for a million dollars. They could never be quite so sensible as I already am of how far I have come short of the glories I see in mental vision, and they would pick flaw after flaw—this was out of drawing, that lacked form or poise, or this was faulty in composition.

I am learning what they can teach me as rapidly as my slow mind permits. It may be years before I can bring hand and brain so in harmony as to realize my vision. It is my labor of love. If it takes the best part of my life to make it perfect I shall not grumble. Meantime, it shall not be profaned by unfriendly eyes.

Living has not been over-costly. It is the

lessons that I shudder to think of. Still, we have a thousand dollars of our little capital. It is in our Barcelona bank, because there interest is higher. Before it is gone I may begin to earn money—not great sums, but modest ones, as modest as our desires. Besides, we shall be in better circumstances; many expenses incident to setting up a home will not have to be met again. The pension helps out famously. Blessings on a thoughtful and noble government that makes provision, even so humbly, for those its defenders left behind. Mother's eyes shine, and she holds up her head in pride, when she goes out with her quarterly check to supply some special need.

Still, I do not quite see how we could have got on but for the good Deering. He knows so much, in so many ways, and all his knowledge has been put at our service. Then he has kept me supplied with flowers—they went a long way toward staving off heart sickness and heart hunger. He has sent us tickets, too, for the opera, the theater, about everything we have cared to see. Once with a batch there was a scrawl: "Look in the upper right hand box tonight. Mrs. Deering has a party in it." Again, he bade me one day look out for her carriage in the park. "I want you to see her under gaslight and by daylight," he said. "It will help you to understand."

It did help me. Mrs. Witherby, I am certain, would say Mrs. Deering was a stylish

woman. I am sure she is stylish myself—but it is rather bad style. She is loud by nature, high-colored, with a face full of heavy lines, and a lumpish figure. In her youth she was square and somewhat raw-boned. At least, I think so, from the way she has laid on fat—or padding. “I can never permit her to take note of your existence. You are out of her world—it is best that you stay out of it,” Deering said, frankly, almost as soon as we were established. “She would call on you if I asked it, and send you a card to one of her interminable dinners. But you would certainly gain nothing by the acquaintance—and you might possibly lose a great deal.”

Deering himself came but rarely, though we heard from him in some fashion at least three times a week. He came always in the morning. “I am supposed to be a man of fashion after fashion is awake,” he explained. “My only freedom betwixt November and midsummer is in the hours I snatch when I ought to be in bed. To make up for them I doze comfortably through the after-dinner oratory, which is among the pains and penalties of being ranked a leading citizen.”

He is fond of riding, and often came to us on his way home from a canter in the park. “I wish you could have the same thing every day,” he said more than once, muttering afterward something about the absurd western way

of not teaching every girl to ride. If only I had been southern I would be as much at home in the saddle as a fish in water. To turn the tables upon him I usually answered that if I had happened to be southern he would probably find my door shut in his face, since he was politically a Republican of Republicans and of a family that had sent more than one famous abolitionist to the nation's councils.

We are friends; we shall never be anything but friends. No doubt at first he felt in some measure what Earle calls the seduction of my womanhood; but that is entirely past. We have agreed tacitly to put aside the handicap of sex and be comrades upon the safe ground of human friendliness and good fellowship.

Next week he comes to The Edge. I shall be glad—so glad—to see him. I feared he would not come—that the memory of the poor lad would be too painful for him. When I said as much, indirectly, he gave me an odd look. “I see you have very much to learn, Selene,” he said, “even about such a simple subject as myself.”

Mother is here with me. Dearest mother, she is more silvery, more wraith-like than ever, yet the soul of cheerful content. “I do not mind anything, Selene, now that you have learned to smile again,” she says. And once, when I talked a bit wildly of hope and fame, she came and kissed my cheek, saying, with tears in her voice: “Darling, I hope you will

do it—all you have planned, and more. When you are famous there is just one thing I shall ask: Tell all the people how John always knew you had genius and how he wanted to set you above all the world. If he had lived he would have done it. Up in heaven he will rejoice to see you do it for yourself.”

Her faith struck me dumb. I cowered and shrank—then suddenly held up my head. If, indeed, John knows, he will understand all it has cost me to keep myself as he left me—unspotted and unstained.

Earle! I no longer let myself think of him. Sometimes in my dreams—but let that pass. The book of life which held him is closed and sealed forever. I love him. I shall love him to the end. But it is not the old delirious madness. If his love had but once been supreme it would have won me. My nature is devoted. I could say, smiling while I said it: “All for love and the world well lost.” But I never lose the world for less than that perfect love which is selfless and complete, casting out fear and knowing nothing of abasement. Earle, I may, after a while, be glad you did not love me so. In your cowardice toward your world I found in part my safeguard. Time is a wonderful consoler—a yet more wonderful teacher. I at least have learned from him that the soul, be it ever so lovelorn, cannot always abide in desolation if it will give itself in full strength to honest, hard work.

CHAPTER XIV.

The Edge, August —.

I must either write or go mad. Inaction is impossible. In the room beyond, mother—my mother, John's mother—lies, peaceful—and dead. O, God! God! Could you not spare me this last blow? She was all I had to love! We kept each other from desolation.

And she was done to death. There lies the sting of it! If I had never tempted her away from home!—but repining is idle. I will set it all down just as it happened. She has seemed so bright and happy this summer, particularly since Mr. Deering came. I think he encouraged her wonderfully about my progress. I know he has never been half so kind in his judgments. It has not been fulsome kindness. Every word has rung true. Only two days back mother said, when he left us: "Ah, Selene, if only I can live to see you famous I shall be ready to depart." The darling never had a thought for herself. It was all for me—because I was a part of John.

This morning we sat at ease together, watching the sun dapple the mountain sides and the clouds play at hide-and-seek with one another as the wind tossed them about. I was almost entirely happy—so near to happiness I felt like pinching myself to see if I were awake

or dreaming. Suddenly a breathless urchin darted up to us with a yellow envelope in his hand. I tried to take it, but mother was before me. She tore it open. I saw a Barcelona date line, with, underneath, the words: "Pioneer Bank closed its doors this morning. Examiner says it is a total wreck."

The signature was unfamiliar. Mother read it through twice, all the time growing white and whiter. Then she flung up her arms and dropped slowly forward. The next minute she would have been on the floor but that I caught and held her.

"Let me help you! She is quite dead!" a voice said two minutes later—Deering's voice. He had followed the messenger up from the village, fearing bad news for us. I railed out at him like a mad woman, bidding him take back what he had said, calling wildly for stimulants, a doctor, help of every sort. He lifted my light burden as though it had been a feather, and bore her where she now lies. Then he took me by the shoulders and pushed me inside my own room, saying, as he slammed the door in my face: "Stay there until you collect yourself a little. I shall do whatever is needed."

He has been better than his word. There was little that could be done. "Heart failure from shock," the doctor said, at first glance, his eye taking in the telegram, still clutched

in her hand. I heard it all—I had opened my door a little way. It was too heartless to leave her all alone, with strangers only about her. Deering kept back the curious crowd. If I had hated him I must henceforth be his friend for life, in memory of his delicate consideration for her—and for me.

“Young Mrs. Barber is overcome. I have all things in charge,” I heard him say. Then he knocked softly on my door, and when I opened it said: “Slip away if you possibly can. The hills will help you—and today you need help sorely.”

I locked the door, and when all eyes were turned, shot out of the bay window and ran away, away—I neither knew nor cared where. For hours I walked, coming back only in the shadow of the friendly dusk. I found Deering waiting for me. “Go in, open your door and rest,” he said. “I will send you something—eat, though you may force each mouthful. Then rest all you may. Tomorrow morning you will start for your old home. You must”—very imperatively. “I know, you know, she craved to be laid beside her son. I shall go with you most of the way. All things will be ready when you reach the town. Be quiet! Do not name money at such a time. Do as you are bidden. You owe it to her, if not to me.”

I obeyed him, silently. All will go as he has planned. Before sunrise she will be going

home. And I am homeless forever. O, mother! mother! If needs must you go, death was doubly, trebly cruel to leave me behind.

* * * * *

New York, Nov. —.

At last I know what it is to be homeless amid the isolation of a great city. No wonder I shrank from coming back to it, though assured of a comfortable abiding place. If I had been ever so eager I could not have come earlier. Deering made me stay in the mountains. Good old Deering. I just begin to appreciate him as he deserves. He says we are chums, or rather partners. I wonder if he has really given me poor Brick's place in his regard! But I shall hardly ever know. He grows more and more silent. I have seen him only three times since he left me on the train twenty miles outside of Barcelona.

"You must not go back to The Edge," he said then, slipping a bit of paper into my hand. "When—when all is over go there—to the place I have written. It is farther south—down in the Virginia hills. I want you to see them in all their autumn glory."

I saw them. Once he came to me when the world was royal in gold and scarlet and purple. It was for but three hours. "I was passing—I stopped to see that you were in no mischief," he said. Then he got horses and took me for a long, long drive over the hills. The air was like wine, the sunlight a benediction; yet

some way they brought me no joy. Deering, too, was ill at ease. He sat very upright, speaking more to the horses than to me. Once he turned and looked at me with a narrow, calculating gaze. Five minutes later he asked abruptly when I could be ready to return to New York.

At once I told him—I was already so deep in his debt—I was anxious to set about finding a way to earn my own living. At least, I meant to tell him all that. He stopped me before I got to the middle. “I wish you would not show yourself so ungrateful,” he said. “Be content to owe until you are called on to pay.” That was more than kind of him, but I cannot be content. Now that I am here I shall do my utmost to, at the least, keep my debt to him from growing much greater.

Lessons I will not have, although I have almost quarreled with him about it. We argued the point for an hour—it is the only subject upon which he speaks in the old, free way. But I held to my purpose so tenaciously he had to say, at last: “Well, well, I give in to you! After all, what does it matter?” Then he almost ran away, leaving me more than ever puzzled. I have heard nothing from him since, save for a line scrawled on the slip about a package of bank notes which a messenger delivered. It was entirely characteristic: “To be broken and taken three times a day.”

There are five hundred dollars in the pack-

age. Added to what I already owe him it makes my debt over a thousand. The amount almost appalls me—but no! I will not let it. Deering is no niggard. He helps free-handed, as he would like himself to be helped in need. Long before this last loan is exhausted I hope to be on my feet. Still, I cannot forget the very strange way he said: “You are dreadfully in need of lessons—from a new, a hard master.” I wonder what the saying can possibly mean.

CHAPTER XV.

New York, June —.

Perhaps I am finding out what Deering meant. Certainly I have had the hard lessons. My money is two-thirds spent, and not one dollar have I earned. Worse, still; I am almost assured that it will be a long time before I can begin earning, if, indeed, I ever do. That is, in ordinary commercial ways. I have tried everywhere to find something I could do marketably, or a market for something already done. Everywhere it is the same story—my work gives promise, but it is not up to the mark. How can I go in the face of such discouragement? Sometimes I spend hours before my Vision, utterly unable to call up the looming heights, the immeasurable depths, the soft splendors, the ineffable glories it owns in my mind.

The Vision is my last hope. If only I could have six months of calm to finish it! I work at it often through furious hours, only to find when next I look at it that it will take other hours to undo all I have wrongly done. I have no friendly counsellor now. Pride forbids that I go to Deering. He has not come near me since the day I rejected his advice. If I went, he would say in chuckling triumph: "So you are willing to be made an artist, after

all. O, yes; you may be a genius born, but the best of them have to be made after they are born. Be good, now, and humble, and contrite. Go to work under your masters, and don't worry over things you cannot help."

Unless some good thing happens very soon I shall be forced to go to him. There is a plan nebulously in my mind. Perhaps he will not laugh at it if only I can summon courage to tell it to him fully. He has not forgotten me; of that I am sure. Christmas and at the new year he sent me beautiful gifts, not offensively costly, but so chosen as to show he knew and remembered my likings. They were very welcome—how welcome one can only know who sits strange among strangers, with only casual surface friendliness in those about.

One day in a shop I met Mrs. Deering face to face. The strangest impulse to speak, to let her know who I was, and what I wanted so much to do fell upon me then and there. If I had yielded to it, it is likely she would have thought me crazy. Her face says she is one who makes no allowance for moods. Still, it is not a bad face; only hard and vacuus, as I fancy her life must be. I fancy, too, had she married a man after her own mould and borne him children as hard and narrow and material as their two selves, she might have been very much happier. She is married, but mateless. Deering shows her all outside deference. She sits at his table, mistress, and is in consequence

a social power. But she must miss something, even if she does not know that she misses it. He told me once the whole duty of a fashionable woman's husband was to pay his wife's bills and show himself in her company once a fortnight through the half year.

I have been working these last four days upon a set of menu cards. Even to such trifles have I tried to bend my talent. In a little while I shall go out with them. A dealer has promised to look at them and try to sell them to a wealthy patron. That is the nearest encouragement I have ever yet come. Who knows but the painted bits are to be my touchstone? If I can live even in the simplest fashion by such things I shall keep on, work on, hope on; then when the Vision is done I shall sell it, though it will be like selling my life; pay my good, patient Deering—and go my ways, happy in the knowledge that if I am humble I am also independent.

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New York, Feb. —.

It is a week since it all happened; longer than that, indeed, since it began. My hand shakes so it is a question if I can write intelligibly, yet I am calm and quiet now by contrast with what I have been since the day when—but I must not let myself think of that first. Steady, Selene! You must understand that you have only yourself to look to now. That self must be cool, calm, passionless, or you will go under.

Now with my nerves tense I will try to say all I have to say briefly, so clearly I shall not be ashamed to read over the record in years to come. I know they will come. Death passes by unhappy souls to take those which revel in the happiness of full life.

My last failure—how the shopmen laughed at my ragged masses of color on the cards—sent me to Deering, desperate but firm. I knew where I might find him in business hours, although I had never been in his office. As I entered it I saw him seated at a desk. He did not look up, but I knew he was somehow subtly aware of my presence. I saw his eyelids quiver the least bit, his mouth relax, then harden under his thick yellow mustache. As I came to the very edge of the desk he glanced up at me, nodded, and said, motioning me to the chair beside it: "Sit down. You have come to your senses?"

"Because I have come here?" I returned, answering his question with another. Again he nodded: "I looked for you earlier, at least three weeks earlier," he said, with a stealing smile. "Well, now that you are here, what is it?"

His tone was cool but not unkindly; he spoke exactly as he might have spoken to a man whom he knew but slightly and did not care to know better. I blessed him inly for the carelessness of it. His face, too, was tranquil. He leaned a little back in his chair, and looked

me full in the face. Then, seeing me glance at the young fellow who stood at a high desk back of himself, he half turned his head to say: "Go outside, Gatchel, and say I am engaged—for the next ten minutes. No; leave the door ajar. Be sure, though, I am not interrupted, and if you hear my bell call up Vallery on the telephone. Vallery is my lawyer," he explained, as the clerk vanished; "a good fellow, but freakish in some points. Now, madam, I am waiting for what you have to say."

"It is not much, and I do not know if I can say it very clearly," I began. "Except the first part, you are right, I wrong. I do not know enough to make my own living. I am afraid the only way for you ever to get your money back is to—to let me spend some more of it."

"How?" he said, speaking so low I hardly caught the word. It came with a hard breath behind it; but even that did not warn me. I hurried on, huddling the words together: "I shall never do anything worth while until I know enough to finish the Vision. All the people I have been to seem to think there is something in me, but none of them can give me work to live by while I bring it out. I thought—that is—I hope you—you have been so kind already—that you will—will let me go somewhere—to Paris, perhaps—where I can starve, and study—O, believe I shall not mind the starving!—until I learn to paint—

really to paint, not to blotch and slur. If you will you shall be paid, if it takes half my life to earn the money—”

“Selene!”

That was all he said, but it stopped me short. His eyes told me the rest even before he reached and caught my hand. “O! You foolish Selene!” he said, laying his cheek upon the hand. “Why do you waste your breath and my time in talking of money? You know—you have known all along—there could never be any question of it between us. If you insist that you owe me—why, there is but one way to pay it. You know what that is. Money! Do not name the stuff! You shall have a thousand dollars to throw to the beggars—if only you will take it.”

“I will not take it—upon your terms!” I cried, wrenching my hand from him and springing to my feet. He, too, got up.

“I advise you to keep cool,” he said; “for your own sake, of course. I assure you that I have, so far as women are concerned, no reputation to lose.”

I sank back, trembling all over, and covered my face with my hands. I could feel the blood leaping in my cheeks; then suddenly rushing back to my heart in a mad, smothering tide. The very earth seemed to rock beneath me. I had been so blind—I had trusted him, believed in him so—even against his own warnings.

After a little he went on: "Be sensible, Selene! I am a bad lot, but it is not wholly a despicable badness. I would not harm you—indeed, my wish is to help you. But I am a man, with one life to live—and just now you are somewhat essential to it. Accept what I can give you, and your future is secure. At a word I will settle upon you money enough to keep you in elegance so long as you live—and do it in such a way that you would never be compromised. In every way I would be as careful of you. You shall stand before the world without spot or blemish. You are new here—almost wholly unknown. If you choose you can figure, as an amateur artist, with an independent income sufficient to provide you a small but handsome establishment. Once you are in it you will find a mighty difference, not only in your work, but in the way people look at it. 'Unto him that hath shall be given.' That would be social truth if Scripture had never said it. Your position would be unquestioned. Further, I have it in my power to put you in the way of knowing many people really worth while. There would never be any talk—those things can always be managed by one who knows how—"

"And your wife?" I asked, looking him full in the eyes. My voice astonished me—it was so low and steady. He shrugged his shoulders the least bit.

"My wife!" he echoed. "My wife would

neither know nor care. Do not let your conscience hurt you on her account, Selene. In taking me you rob nobody who has a better right. Now, for years and years we have held our ways apart. And even if she knew, I think she would approve my taste—you are certainly an improvement upon the others.”

“What others?” It was all I could say. Again he gave the shrug, one shoulder rising a little above the other.

“There are always others, my girl,” he said. “Best not know too much about them. But this I promise you: When you are mine you shall be supreme—for, at the least, six months. It may be longer, of course, but I do not bind myself. One never knows what may happen while the old planet is rolling around.”

I had been looking over his head. Now I stood up and set my blazing eyes full on his face. “So that is what you have planned!” I said, my hands clinching. “And I thought you understood the sort of woman you were befriending. Do you know, if I would take what you offer—if I would take anything in exchange for my poor self—I could have had it all twice over two years ago—and the man I loved beside?”

“O! That man! I remember him! He let you have your own way there in the hills,” Deering said, carelessly. “Even then, Selene, I thought him a fool to do it. Let us not go into heroics over this. Recognize, my young

woman, that you are bound to be some man's prey—why not mine rather than any other?"

"That is what he said—the man I loved!" I answered. Deering laughed—a hard laugh. "So he was not such a fool, after all," he said. "I forgot—then you had not tried your wings."

I sat down, shaking like a leaf. His last words brought back to me the horrible truth. I was hopelessly his debtor—for months I had existed upon his bounty. The weight of obligation seemed to crush—to stifle me. I flung up my hands, and let my head fall upon the edge of the desk, moaning out: "O! Why are you so cruel! So very cruel! I never dreamed you could be so."

"It is you who are cruel—to us both," he said, trying to take my hand. I drew it away from him, and buried my face in it. Big, scalding tears forced themselves between my fingers. Deering drew me to him, and said, as he wiped them away: "The harder the shower the sooner it is over—but, Selene, let me beg you not to cultivate a knack of indulging thus in domestic hydraulics."

"I thought we were friends—comrades!" I moaned. "You were so good to poor Brick—why will you not be as good to me?"

"Because you are a woman—and because, further, you have set up your will against mine," Deering answered, promptly. "Brick, poor lad, never made that mistake. But I should not scold you, naughty girl that you

are. The pleasure of subduing you is worth a very great deal."

"I dare say it will be—when it is yours," I said, wrenching myself free of him. The sudden fury that had fallen upon me brought a maniac's strength. Big as he is, and well-muscled, I could have choked him then and there. My fingers ached with a murderous inclination to close about his throat. I locked them behind me and hurried on. "I wonder at you—you seemed a man of discerning. You have seen me many times—I have not tried to mask from you what manner of woman I am—grateful, loyal, readily responsive to kindness, only too eager to put those who are my friends in the high niches and do them homage. If you were but the man I took you to be, then, indeed, I should have been in danger—not from you, for that man will never take advantage of any woman—but from my own heart. I might have loved you, in time, so entirely as to efface that other love and all consideration for myself. And then I might have come to you at your lightest bidding. I do not set myself so austere and virtuous as to be beyond the tempting of human impulses. I wonder that you did not see it. I wonder that you were so blind—most of all, I wonder that you dared to think I would yield under compulsion."

"You mean—you will not?" he asked, his brows drawing together, a sneering smile settling about his mouth. I bowed in silence. His frown deepened.

"How, then, do you mean to pay what you owe?" he asked. "If you make our relations only those of debtor and creditor I shall have to ask that you name some security for my claim."

"I have my picture—but—but it is not finished," I began, biting my lips to keep back a fresh flood of tears. He nodded coldly.

"I was thinking of that," he said. "It will suffice, but, of course, you must guarantee to finish it. In its present state it is—a stretch of canvas—neither more nor less."

"I will do it—though I do not see how I can—do it or die," I said, getting up and turning toward the door. He stopped me, catching my arm in a vise-like grip. "Wait a minute!" he said. "I must save you from yourself—if you will let me. Do nothing rashly. Take time—three days, at least—to think over everything. At the end of them I will come to you—you had better not be seen here again. Do not look so alarmed. I am not coming alone. I shall bring Vallery. Whatever you decide on, the matter must be arranged in business fashion. I do not want to be harsh with you, Selené, but really the man you sent away was right. You are bound to turn men's heads, wherever you may go. It is what such women are made for. No; it is not your face—not even your form—though both are divinely lovely. There is something beyond—something that steals into a man whether or no, and

makes him wild to possess you. Think of your position—alone, friendless, moneyless—if you persist in standing out against me. Think, too, that as I am, so are all other men—neither brutes nor demons—simply men. You can only live and work, or rather work to live by some man's leave—he will make conditions before granting it—take my word for that. And you can save yourself, shield yourself forever, by just one little word. At least, think well before you refuse to speak it.”

“I will,” I said. “But do not think I shall change. I am going to ask God to give you a better mind.” Then I rushed away, with his low laugh sounding in my ears, like the laughter of the Furies trebly sure of their prey.

Once outside the nipping air refreshed and revived me. I had left him full of one mad thought—the river. I could find it, and in the darkness hide myself forever beneath its waters. With the sharp, electric west wind cutting my cheeks the cowardly purpose fled. I was alive to my finger tips—I would live out my life. More, I would not sit down supine in the face of this fresh misfortune. Action was imperative. Before it I must have counsel. I clutched my purse tight, then opened it and looked at the roll of bills within. Deering's money, I smiled to think, could not be better spent than in trying to balk his evil purpose. I saw clearly what that purpose was—to bind me in legal meshes, and, thus hampered, wear down my strength. My picture, he well knew,

was more than life to me. All my hope, all my future, was staked on it. Controlling that he would be able to shut the last door of escape. He should not control it if there was any way out of it—and there must be a way.

I was in the lower city's mazes—wholly strange to me. It was a dull day, raw and lowering. From many windows in the tall sky-scrapers there came the flare of gas and electric lights, though it was but three o'clock in the afternoon. I stepped within the revolving doors of one especially tall structure, stood a minute, irresolute, then said to the watchman in uniform: "I want to find a good lawyer. Is there one in the building?"

"Steenth floor—room 1197," he answered, waving me toward one of the smaller express cars. In a second it shot upward like a rocket. By the time I had fairly caught breath it stopped, well above surrounding roofs, the door was flung open, and the man in charge cried: "Room 1197—down the hall! To your right."

I did not look at the name on the door. It gave entrance to a very handsome suite of offices. "Say, a lady, a stranger, is in need of legal advice," I said to the boy at the desk, waving my hand impatiently toward the inner spaces. Perhaps my wild look awed him. In a minute he came back, almost running, and said, holding open the door: "This way, ma'am!—he's in there—the boss himself."

I remember nothing more until I found my-

self seated in a big leather-cushioned chair, facing a man with the kindest eyes in the world. Still, they were keen eyes. I should never attempt to dissemble when they looked at me. His voice was deep but musical—the very sound of it soothed my edged nerves. He was beyond middle height, slender and alert-looking, with firm, capable hands, not over-soft, but supple and fine of line, well, even, and daintily kept.

“How can I serve you, madam?” he asked, when I had stammered some sort of explanation of my presence. I was silent a half-minute before I answered: “By listening to what I must tell you and then telling me the exact truth. I am hard beset. No woman, I think, was ever more so. I have no friends, and but little money. Do not think, though, that I have come for charity—even charity advice—”

“I am not uneasy on that score,” he interrupted. “If you had not a cent you would be welcome to such help as my counsel might give. I am no Quixote—I do not profess to be better than my world. Indeed, I may fairly class myself among men of the world. Still, in all my life, I have loved just one woman and one little girl. They are my wife and my daughter. My mother died before my memory. For her sake, for their sakes, I stand ready to help a woman whenever I can. Now, that we understand each other so far, please go on with what you have to say.”

I told him, glazing nothing, keeping back

only names. When I had finished he sat a minute in deep thought, then said slowly: "I am sorry, but I do not see how you will avoid taking the one course or the other that your creditor has indicated. Doubtless he seems to you very cruel, very despicable. I have nothing to offer in defense of him; but, my dear madam, it is the way of the world."

"If I were your sister what would you advise?" I burst out. He looked at me with a strange smile as he answered: "That is un-supposable. I never had a sister. But—if the case concerned a woman who was anything to me I should never advise—I should simply kill the man."

"You have answered me," I said. He shook his head. "Remember, I advise nothing," he said. "But as I think your mind is made up I will tell you your legal rights. Such transfers as your—creditor has asked are not very common, but still a recognized form of security. Picture dealers sometimes take them—but," as he saw my eyes brighten, "no dealer would care to take yours, for the reason that he would have to advance so large a sum before the transfer would be effectual. You are, by your own showing, wholly unknown, and but partly taught your chosen art. That would make the world say your creditor had been magnanimous in letting you go so deep in debt to him. You say he is to bring his lawyer with him. Then all I can add is, be certain you read and understand any instrument they may of-

fer you to sign. Read before you sign, have the signatures properly witnessed, then trust to providence. I am sure some way will open to you. No, no!" as he saw me unclasping my purse. "Keep whatever you have in hand. My claim may wait better days—without security. Do not be too much depressed, either, over this transfer. The man who holds it may have sinister motives in demanding it, but it will prove a barrier to him, a shield to you. You have put him in a coldly commercial light—it will be henceforth beyond his power to injure you. As to studying, you can do that here at almost no cost. It is possible I may help you that way after a little—I have friends who look after undeveloped talent such as yours seems to be. Let me have your address. I will write—"

"I cannot give an address," I said. "At least, not one that will be valid a week hence. I am going away from all I know or ever saw or heard of in the city—going to bury myself in its obscurest quarter—until I can feel myself again a free woman."

"You love your picture?" he asked.

"More than my life," I said. He looked a little troubled. "I could never advise a woman to her hurt," he said; "but, after all, in your case, I am uncertain what you really should do."

"I am not," I said. "Nor do I think you are. You are only uneasy as to whether I have

really the strength to endure cold and starvation because of the choice I make."

"You are right," he said, with a smile in his eyes. It did not reach the lips, yet his whole face was illumined. When I turned to go he walked beside me to the door, and said, as he shook my hand: "Keep your courage up! When that goes, everything goes."

As I went down the swiftly dropping car seemed to beat out the rythm of an old, old song I have heard a little German shoemaker sing. He lived just across from the library—Barcelona's library. By the way, I cannot realize now that Barcelona and the library ever existed. This was the song—its iteration used often to half madden me. It came back as insistently while I made that percipitous passage earthward:

"Goods gone—something gone,
Must bend to the oar,
And earn thee some more.

Honor gone—much gone;
Must go and gain glory,
Then the idle gossips
Will alter their story.

Courage gone—all gone;
Better not have been born."

So the old man sang—sometimes in soft, half lisping German; oftener in the rough and rugged English version. I had not thought of him—of his song—since the day I left Barcelona in that first flight. Yet now a stranger's word, so strangely spoken, had brought them both back as clear as daylight.

CHAPTER XVI.

I can write only briefly of those three days. No inquisitor, not Torquemada himself, ever devised a torment so exquisite. In the watches of the night, through my broken sleep, Earle came to me, smiling and mocking me. "You would not take love," I heard him say, "because in your pride you said love meant shame. Now you have bread of shame thrust on you. You knew how it would be. I warned you; yet you would not listen."

Or else he looked at me in horror, saying: "You—you are not Selene! You have only stolen her eyes to lure men to the devil." Then I woke up, shrieking, my face bathed in icy sweat. Earle, if ever I made you suffer, you are avenged a hundred fold in those long hours of anguish. I wonder now that I lived through them—that I did not run out into the night and plunge into icy waters. Something withheld me—something outside myself. I was spent, broken, so spiritless at times that I even speculated dully if, after all, it would not be better to give in to Deering's will.

"You will be warm always—you can keep away from the eyes of the world. You know you hate them, staring, peering, calculating, forever alert to spy out a flaw," I told myself at such times. "And you can give days and

nights to the Vision. It is all you have to live for. Why not sacrifice all that it may be worthily wrought?"

No answer would come to the question. Only a dead, blank horror rose and wrapped my faculties. Sometimes it numbed them—I even felt calm and quiet. Then in a little the pall lifted and all my soul bruises began to ache and throb and cry out in pain. I looked in the glass, and hated my face, hated my eyes for their soft fire, and the curl of the lashes about them. Then the thought would sweep down: "You are an anachronism—one of nature's mistakes. She designed you for a throne, where you could have ruled men as of right and been guarded by armies of your lieges!" After that I would cry out over my own folly—such rank, idiotic folly, bred, no doubt, by the memory of Semiramis and Earle's wild, worshipping words.

Ah, me! A woman born with the trick of fascination in her eyes, needs to be married by the time she is out of short frocks. If John had been spared to me I might never have known the full glory of existence—true love is its flower and crown—but I should certainly have missed knowing humiliation bitterer than death.

All those three days the weather had lowered angrily. That last night the clouds gathered into a howling, shrieking snowstorm. At morning it still snowed. Even the city's

grime was hidden in pure and spotless white. I looked out on it with a calm as frozen. All my unrest, all my tremors had fled. So had my healthy color. My whole countenance was as waxen as the petals of a camelia. There were some deep red roses upon my table. I knew who sent them when they came the evening before, yet had not the heart to fling them out into the storm. I lifted a full-blown one and buried my lips in it. The reflection of it was like a blood stain, yet I smiled to see it. "O, rose! Sign of silence!" I said in my heart. "Pledge me silence, indeed, for this day, when I must walk through a fiery furnace."

At breakfast people exclaimed over my parlor, but I smiled them aside. It was no crude and vulgar outcry—we are a select company here in this family hotel. As I left the breakfast room the housemaster drew me a little aside. "I have had a message from Mr. Deering. It says he will be here about eleven to see you on business. I have reserved the small parlor. Will it suit you to see him there?"

"Perfectly!" I said, walking steadily away. A sudden fancy siezed me to put on my widow's weeds. I have kept them, why I know not. Mother made me promise not to wear black for her, so they have lain in lavender, untouched, almost as fresh as new, at the very bottom of my largest trunk. The gown was almost outgrown, but when it was fastened made me look wonderfully slender and girlish.

It comes high about the throat and is swathed, almost smothered, in crepe. Over it I put my widow's bonnet and sweeping veil, then glanced at myself with a little cry. I had lost fifteen years. The same girl looked out at me who had first put on that trailing sable vesture, and wondered, almost childishly, that though she wore a widow's garb her heart was the heart of a child.

The small parlor is a nook of warm, dull reds. It never looked more attractive than by contrast with the white whirl outside. There is a gas grate. Its leaping light played here and there, setting up tricky shadows and still more tricky gleams. Deering stood looking down at it, a hard, insolent smile on his face. There was another man back of him. I could not see him clearly for the big bulk of my tormentor. As he caught the sound of trailing garments he turned half about. The sight of me astounded him. With a bound almost he reached my side, took both my hands in his, and asked: "Selene! Mrs. Barber! What have you done to yourself?" Then, over his shoulder: "Oh, Vallery, let us have a minute together. The thing is not fully arranged yet."

I did not look up. My ears alone told me the other man had stepped outside the door. Deering still held my hands. "How dare you to be so wicked?" he said.

"How dare you be so wicked?" I flung back at him. He laughed in his throat. "I dare

anything—to gain my ends,” he said; then, his voice suddenly softening till it was like a caress: “You are so strangely, so diabolically enchanting this morning I feel I would rather kill you than let you go. Be a good child—you will be glad of it—so glad—once the plunge is over. No—you need not speak—only press my hand the least little bit—and I shall know I have won—then Vallery can come in and make his big-wig law talk. You shall have your settlements all secure before you give me even so much as one kiss.”

I snatched away my hands. “You need not have waited. You had my answer three days ago,” I said. He fell back a step and looked me over coldly, with cruel, wolfish eyes, but said no word for a minute. Then:

“In that case—oh, Vallery! We are ready for you now.” As the door opened I raised my eyes and saw my unknown kindly counsellor. He looked at me with a sort of whimsical amazement. Certainly he had never guessed that he had been called into a case where the opposing person was his own friend and client.

“Mr. Vallery, Mrs. Barber!” Deering said, in his finest, most artificial manner. He bowed, but did not offer to shake hands. Vallery pulled a folded paper from his pocket and handed it to Deering, who passed it on to me with a sardonic smile. My hand shook so that when I attempted to unfold it, it fell and was almost drawn into the flame of the grate. Both

men bent to rescue it. As he rose Deering gave me a meaning glance, and said, under his breath: "That is what ought to be done with it—it should be burnt before all our eyes."

"You have my permission to burn it—if you can trust sufficiently to my word," I answered. He looked at me half in doubt. "If I burn it, it means—surrender," he said, in the same hushed key. I shook my head faintly. The room, the people in it, all began to swim. Rallying myself desperately, I walked to the table upon which stood pen and ink, sat down beside it and held out my hand for the paper.

Slowly, carefully, conscientiously, I read it—every line. Not one word penetrated my numb comprehension; but, thank God, Deering did not dream that was the fact. I felt his eyes devouring me as I read. I felt, too, Vallery's gaze of infinite compassion. Presently I laid down the instrument and looked up at him with a question in my eyes. I saw his lips shape inaudibly: "You had better sign it. It is the only way."

I spread out the paper, dipped my pen savagely in the ink-well, and tried to write my name. In vain! The pen fell from my nerveless fingers and rolled upon the carpet. As Vallery stooped to give it back to me he said in my ear: "Sign! Sign quick! The quicker the better!"

I tried hard to obey him. Somehow it

seemed to me I must obey, no matter what he had said. But still my fingers refused their office—I could not shape a letter, try as I might. In despair I glanced up at Deering—he was watching me still with those hungry, devouring eyes. The sight made me desperate—I felt that I must scream if I had to endure his oversight through another minute. I began to write—a big, bold, black S stared me in the face. Suddenly a realization of what I was doing—of the long, losing, hopeless fight I was binding myself to undertake—rushed over me and made me fall back in the chair, white and shaking, gasping out: “Kill me, if you choose; but if I must live, leave me my picture!”

Actually I was begging—begging of this man from whom I had felt it would be degradation to take hereafter even a crust. He sprang to my side, saying, thickly: “I do not want to be harsh with you, Selene. I will not be unless you compel me.”

Vallery came suddenly between us. “Excuse me, but you two can arrange these personal matters at your leisure,” he said. “As I have to get away soon please get through with the business of signing, so I can get through with the attesting. Mrs. Barber, let me write the name, since you are so nervous. I will put underneath it ‘Per V. in the presence of both parties to the agreement above

written, by direction of the said Selene Barber,' and no court on earth can ever upset it."

"Thank you!" I said, gratefully. Deering looked black as a thunder cloud. But he took the paper as soon as Vallery had finished with it, and slipped it into his pocket before he came up to me. Then he said, trying to take my hand: "Remember, Selene, I give up—nothing. Holdfast is the dog that wins, no matter how long the chase."

The rest is a great, blank darkness. Today I seem to be getting into a sort of gray twilight. Tomorrow—what of tomorrow? Fate, perhaps, can answer. I certainly cannot.

Book Third.

THE MAN WHO DID.

CHAPTER XVII.

VALLERY WRITES:

New York, March —.

My Dear Bolton:

Thanks for not disappointing me, old man. I was pretty sure my real romance, with a coincidence so strange as to stagger belief thrown in, would interest you more than a little. You see, I have not forgotten your taste for stories, real stories, the human comedies and tragedies that are so much stranger and more moving than those which get on the stage. Because of the taste I shall think it's a pity you took to making things instead of the law. True, you have incidentally piled up a few surplus millions, but what are millions in comparison with seeing quite to the bottom of things, as is a lawyer's troublesome privilege.

I fear I am going to find it troublesome—no end. Our mutual friend Deering, who is a mighty profitable client and a pretty general

good fellow, can be an unconscionable scoundrel when it comes to women. His wife, of course, excuses something. A man would have to be superhuman if, tied to her, he did not permit himself compensations. It is Ouida, I believe, who comments upon the uselessness of jewels with which Faust tempts Marguerite—the Marguerites, in her opinion, being all too ready to go the limit without them. Ouida has a way of putting unwholesome truths about men and women between the covers of her books. Because this is truth even more than because it is unwholesome, I must condemn my client, Deering, for seeking not merely to tempt, but to compel this unwilling Marguerite.

Still, I do not wholly blame him. The woman is a real ox-eyed Juno, and Deering, as Master Charles Reade puts it, “the male of her species.” Certainly he is wild about her—wilder than about all his twenty previous loves. Indeed, I doubt if he felt for the whole of them one-tenth of what he is now feeling for her. Of course, he is a very Turk for jealousy of her. My greatest fear is that some day, in an unguarded moment, she may precipitate a tragedy. She is, it is true, neither a fool, nor a child. I judge she must be thirty if she is a day. But she has the most provoking lack of comprehension of the equation of the sex. Deering was unselfishly kind to a man who was in much her own case—had artistic ca-

pabilities lacking development—and she either cannot or will not understand why he is not as unselfishly helpful to her.

Right there lies the problem of modern times. But we won't discuss it now. I am telling you a story; not indulging in philosophical disquisitions. This story is halting to the outward eye, yet, I doubt not, making swift progress toward the inevitable end. The woman has gone away from her fine, select quarters—she is living in the barest, narrowest little room now—and she has just one hundred dollars—Deering's dollars, at that—between her and starvation. In fact, I dare say she is half starving now, pinching and saving to eke them out until she can in some fashion not wholly despicable earn more. She would make a magnificent model, but I fancy there are mighty few men who could look into her eyes and name the matter to her.

For she has the most irritating, the most irrational innocence in her gaze. It kept Deering at bay for rising a year. With almost any other woman he would have come to the point in a month. And even now, when he is so sore and mad over it all, I think that same irrational innocence will protect her from anything more at his hands than the assault of circumstances. That is, I think he will not lift a hand to keep her from getting on, any more than he will lift a hand to help her to do it. He is waiting—waiting for the pressure

of civilization to force her into his arms. And because, in his own mind, he plays thus fairly, it will go very hard with any man who steps in to thwart him—and circumstances.

Yet I have a great mind to be that man. That is really the point of this swift answer to your letter. You are, I think, the whitest fellow I have ever known. You know me—my prospects, capabilities, obligations—better than I know them myself. You know, too, what it means if Deering is put against me. His own business is very considerable, and he has it in his power to throw me very much more. So far he has thrown a large part of it, which I have managed so satisfactorily there is every likelihood that I may get the whole of it. Then, too, he has backed me socially to a gratifying degree. It is through his putting me up that I have got an early entrance to at least two of the city's most influential clubs, and clubs, I do not need to tell you, are tremendous helps when a man aspires, as I do, to the handling of great concerns.

Now, in the face of all this; in face, too, of the duty I owe myself and my dear and ambitious wife—what do you say? Am I justified in following out my natural impulse to put this woman, who is the most casual of chance acquaintances, with no shadow of claim on me beyond the common human claim, in the way of making her own living and thereby making an enemy of Deering? If another man asked

me in cold blood the question I have asked you I should tell him he was a fool to risk so much. But, somehow, I cannot get that woman's irrationally innocent eyes out of my mind. They haunt me. In fact, more than once they have come between me and the consideration of a knotty legal point. I must in some way get rid of them. I must either help her or forget that she exists. Which shall it be?

Before answering consider also this point: So far, as you know, all women have been to me pretty much the same—saving always my dearest wife. Ours has been an ideal union—we have been ten years married without one single disagreement that a quick kiss could not heal. She suits and satisfies me to the utmost. I am proud of her grace and charm—of her sweet, wholesome, clear-headed practicality. If I ever succeed as I hope, it will be very much her doing. She is in every sense a help-meet. More than that, her tact, her thrift, her pretty ways, the charming home she makes for me—all, all are potential in many ways. I shall never be less than her lover, ardent and true. Notwithstanding, there is something in this other woman that stirs me as I have never before been stirred. You see, I am legal enough to make no reservations in stating my case. A man is the worst sort of fool who does not tell his lawyer-judge neither more nor less than the exact truth. While I am as certain as of

my existence that nothing could ever imperil my wife's supremacy, I have a strong, almost fearful doubt that if I see too much of the Juno I may find myself in a frame of mind and body my conscience will be very far from approving.

Now, answer! Answer quick! I can help Mrs. Barber in a perfectly honest and business-like way. It seems desperately cruel to refrain, and desperately dangerous to do it. Help me with my puzzle as only such a white, good fellow can. Remember, I am not among the persons who ask advice solely that in case of things going wrong they may have somebody else to blame.

The nature of this letter will excuse the lack of my wife's usual pretty messages. She is well—so is the girl, who says she means to grow big enough to be your sweetheart. I know she would send you a kiss if she knew I was writing. As to me, you have known this long, long time that I was always

Yours to count on,

FRANCIS M. VALLERY.

(Telegram.)

Milltown, Ill., March —.

Francis M. Vallery, New York City:

Letter received. The man who won't help a woman whenever he can, as much as he can,

as quick as he can, is not worth damning. Go ahead. D—— is not the only man in the world whose concerns need looking after. If you lose any business call on me to make good. Write particulars in full as soon as there is anything to write. But be sure to act at once—this last is italics. Yours, etc.,

BOLTON.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SELENE WRITES:

New York City, March —.

There is not room for even confidence here in this cramped place, still, I shall talk a bit with my one confidante and see if talking will in any way relieve the strain of these endless days. It is two weeks now since I left the hotel—to become a very big and very helpless sister of the poor. At least, that is the way I seem to myself. The odd thing is—I cannot realize that I myself am of the poor—worse than poor, indeed, in that I am deeply in debt.

O, me! That is the thought, the memory that poisons all my days, makes my nights sleepless and so weights the wings of my fancy I work only by the greatest effort. Yet that can make little difference in the final settlement. I must starve—or give in to Deering. Every day makes me surer and surer of that. I have walked until my feet are blistered looking for work. I even thought I would be a housemaid—I was too honest to try for a cook's place, since I know nothing of the work. I can clean a room and make it pretty, more than pretty, indeed, if I have the chance. But I shall never have it. Three applications have convinced me of that fact. The first

woman stared at me with languid insolence and shrugged her shoulders when I said I had never "lived out before." "I am sure as I can be she is a criminal," I heard her say in a loud whisper to her daughter. Then to me: "You—er—will not suit at all. In fact, you are—are too big for the rooms—we like things harmonious, you see."

The next of my prospective mistresses was, I judge, a semi-invalid. She sat propped amid cushions, and after the first glance turned her eyes away, saying, fretfully: "You will never, never do for me—you are too overpowering. You oppress me." As I bowed myself away the maid who had let me in said, with a wink: "You had oughter come when the master's round about. He'd a-given you a show—he has an eye for a good figger."

The last—ah, me! I have hardly the heart to write on. It does not seem to me this can possibly be Selene Barber who has been creeping in at area doors, begging humbly for a chance to earn a menial's bread! The last woman might have given me a trial if I would have agreed to bring her a letter from my pastor. I told her he lived a long way off. Then, after the manner that very good people appear to think it is their privilege to torture their dependents, she set to work questioning me—as to my home, my bringing up, the whys and wherefores of my going in service. I parried as best I might, watching all the while

her mouth grow grim and grimmer. It did not in the least astonish me when she said: "It is evident you have some shameful story to hide. I can never take into my employ any sly and tricky person who refuses to be frank with me. No. It is not your appearance wholly which tells against you. Nowadays servants all aspire to look as much like mistresses as possible. If you had told me the truth I might have helped you. As it is I cannot reconcile it with my Christian duty to give you employment."

Afterward I understood. The lady is almost a professional philanthropist. All her life she has had so much that she cannot conceive the possibility of anyone less fortunate ever being tempted. I am glad she shut her doors on me. If she had taken me I should have felt in honor bound to stay through my allotted time, and it could not have failed to be a period of torture. Whatever comes I am free—save in one quarter.

My money wastes away like snow in sunshine, though I hold to each penny with a grip like death. I have tried to strike a fair bargain with myself on behalf of my creditor. Half of each day I give to working on the Vision; the other half to trying to earn a living. My creditor was sharp. He stipulated that I should not remove the canvas without due notice to him. Thus he makes sure of me, of knowing where I am, and of knowing easily

whatever I may undertake. I cannot bring the Vision here. The whole room is not big enough for it. So I have left it in the studio where it was begun. That adds materially to the cost of living, but what else can I do? If only I were a man I would go and live in the studio itself. I am strongly tempted to do it, anyway. True, nobody stays in the building except by daylight; but what would that matter to me, once I was safe behind locks and bars?

Yes! The more I think of it the better does that plan appear. As to eating—I am a frightfully hearty animal, but I shall master my appetite and bring it within reasonable bounds. Bread and water, even, can be tempting—if one is but hungry enough. Counting as close as I may, I have enough to keep from starving for two months ahead. Practically it is one month in which to work for myself. I will do something each day to the Vision, if it is no more than to stand despairingly in front of it and realize its faults.

I must have more lessons. How to get them is a problem. The classes are all made up now—there will be no new ones until fall, except the summer schools, which are as hopeless in my present condition as entrance to the gates of heaven. I have haunted the dealers until they shy at sight of me, yet now and again they look at something and say, as they give it back. “If you knew how—”

They do not go farther; they have no need. I understand only too well that deprecating shrug and carelessly pitying glance. Once I would have resented both bitterly; now I am callous to things so slight. Yesterday something happened that gave me a keen twinge. Friday is, after all, the proper day for ill-luck. I had just shown a little new sketch—which is truly not half bad. It is a simple, simple thing—only a blur of purple distances with a gray, craggy rock standing out against them, and at the side of it a plume of waving golden rod. Of course, it is from nature—one of the things I roughed in there in the days before Brick died. The dealer looked at it, then narrowly at me. I think the desperate eagerness in my eyes gave him his cue. He handed back the sketch, saying: “O, it is—what shall I say—decorative? But we want art, Ma’am! Art! Nothing else will our public have.” I turned to go, when another woman dashed at him—dashed is the proper word, she moved strictly in that way. She was youngish, and very rosy, with fluffy, brown hair, and had made herself a picture in moss-green frock and cape. She had diamonds, too, on her fingers, and a gold-tipped arrow thrust through her beff-eater hat. Altogether, she was very radiant, very prosperous-looking, and full of babyish wiles. She smiled up at the dealer, and made little soft clucks of impatience while he ran through the half a dozen things in her

portfolio. At the end he flung back one of them, saying, with a pretense of a frown: "No, no! Miss Carfax! I positively cannot pay good money for that thing. These others now—well, how much do you want for them? Remember, I am not going to bankrupt myself, as I did the last time."

Airily she named a price that simply made me stare. Maybe I am no fair judge, but her work was ragged, no bit better drawn than mine, and nothing like so well colored. But she got what she asked, after a little haggling, and went away, looking daggers at me for having presumed to linger until the transaction was complete. When she had gone I plucked up courage to ask: "If I did something in that line?"

"O! Quite impossible!" said the dealer. "Besides, even if you could, we could not buy them—as matters stand. You—you have nobody back of you—nobody who will go about in public asking: 'Seen those things of Mrs. Barber's down at La Quelle's? Great, aren't they? That woman has a future.' Then you have not the people who come to buy, because they know Miss Carfax sells here. No, they are not her friends, but she has friends these others want to please. Oh, she is a young woman who will get on anywhere. She is making herself a public name even before she is an artist. Oh, yes; it is possible she may never be an artist, but she will live, she will thrive—she has no need of money."

I, too, might have no need of money! Cynically, I am sometimes almost tempted to make a trial of myself—not as an applicant, but a proud and haughty amateur. Deering seems to have known his world very well. How I wish he could have known me as well! What misery I might have escaped! I will try to do him justice. Bad as he is, he is not wholly so. If he had never let himself think of me as—as what he would have me be, I am sure we might still be excellent friends. As it is, I have aroused his two strongest forces—desire and the impulse of mastery. It is with him somewhat as it was with Earle—in refusing to become what he would have me be I have made myself doubly the object of his desire.

It is odd how often we meet nowadays, bow gravely, and pass on unsmiling. I cannot understand it. Heretofore such encounters were rare. Perhaps it is because of Lent—society turns itself around in all things then, I hear, and goes about to see the things it has left for the penitential season. Pictures are, I suppose, among them. Yesterday, after my encounter with Carfax, I ran across Deering with three other men of his sort. There were as many women in the party. They were doing the art stores, it appears. Two of the women were from out of town, and the third, who is Deering's distant cousin, their hostess and chaperone. After I had passed, returning Deering's bow with my best society inclination

of the head, I felt them all turn and stare after me, and caught a subdued babble of comment, though no word of it was distinct. I could fancy, too, that if he had said of me what Miss Carfax's friends no doubt say of her in like case there would have begun for me a ripple of reputation that might in the end have had desirable results.

Please the good Lord, one day Deering shall be proud to have me recognize him and to speak in my praise if he speaks at all. On the face of things that seems hopeless, yet I have not wholly lost either hope or faith. I must confess, though, both are often at low ebb—so low that, though I have wanted this ever so long to go to church, I have not done it. Ever since mother—but I will not go back to that. There was a girl in the hotel, a girl with a voice, who, perhaps, must answer for my staying so steadily away from the sanctuary. She herself went regularly. “Why, you cannot afford to stay away!” she said to me one day in amazement at my home-keeping Sundays. “Do you not know it is the church people who really help one to get on? They look out for one, especially a stranger who comes regularly, and thus you get in the way of letting it be known how you can be helped without the least loss of dignity. Of course, the sermons are a bore—and those missionary meetings and things just fearful. But by singing at one of them I got three parlor engagements.

I wish I could go to two churches—alternate Sundays, you know—but Christians are real beasts for selfishness. If you do not stick to one set all the time you will get nothing from them whatever.”

After that I would not go, for fear I might be thought as sordid as she. I cannot bring myself to make God’s house a market place, nor His day one on which I must look out for material advancement. “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy,” runs the commandment. I do try, in my poor, imperfect way, to keep it holy, putting evil thought and troubles far away from me, and meditating on the unsearchable riches, the unspeakable glories of God and heaven. It may be I am in the wrong. At any rate, I have so far mastered my pride—there is an unconscious and pharasaical pride that one is not just as other people—I have, I say, so mastered my pride that in the morning I shall put on my black clothes, take my little, worn prayer book, and steal away to church.

The very thought of it is soothing. I shall revel in the organ harmonies, and feast my eyes upon the rich lights through the windows even before the sermon begins. God grant that it may hold for me some special word of comfort. Lone sparrow upon a housetop that I am, I yearn to be less alone.

CHAPTER XIX.

New York, March —.

Let me try to be, beyond all things, just. Truth is the best aid to justice, therefore I shall write down exactly what happened.

Sunday morning I awoke, rested, refreshed, even, by the reflex action of my resolve. It was a clear morning—the sky of that clean, hard, brilliant blue that belongs to a March morning after a night of frost. My first conscious thought was a prayer. I had resolved to fast until evening, so no sloth of flesh might cumber my waking spirits. A certain exaltation possessed me. I was not conscious of cold nor hunger as I walked out into the streaming sunshine. The bells were already chiming. O, the tender, the sublime invitation of their pealing! Almost I heard in it the old, familiar words:

“Jesus, lover of my soul,
Let me to Thy bosom fly!
While the nearer waters roll,
While the tempest still is nigh,
All my trust on Thee is stayed,
All my help from Thee I bring;
Cover my defenseless head
With the shadow of Thy wing.”

And, listening, my burden seemed to slip away, my heart to sing for joy. Like one in a happy dream I followed the chimes until

they led me to a portal of purest Gothic, richly carved and fretted, as was the slender, springing spire. A throng of devout worshipers poured through the door. There was no wandering glance, no intrusive speech to mar the holy hush of a holy time and place. Reverently I bent my head and went in with them. At the threshold I paused the least bit. Slight as the pause was, it marked me for what I was—a pilgrim and a stranger. Instantly a kindly hand touched my arm, a kindly voice said: "There are family sittings here, but all seats are free, all comers welcome."

Still, I hesitated a little. The man who had spoken to me waved me forward. Very shortly I found myself seated less than a dozen pews from the pulpit, in a softly cushioned space, beside a pair of richly but quietly dressed women, whose faces said they did not resent my presence. But one of them had the look of a corpse. The spring sunshine through the purple border of a south window poured a flood of ghastly radiance full upon her.

I barely glanced at her. Her companion I saw only as one sees a lay figure. The whole rich interior was entering into my soul. It was so full of color and beauty and the atmosphere of holy devotion. Up above the great organ pealed, flooding nave and chancel with quivering harmony. The flowers upon the pulpit seemed to tremble in the joy of it, and all the glorious light-colors to dance in tune. My

heart leapt up to dance with them, the while it was murmuring inly: "Blind! O, blind and ingrate! All this might have been yours—the gift of God's children—and you have kept rebelliously away!"

I sank back against my cushions full of happy tremors that almost overran my brimming eyes. I resolved upon the instant to let myself go—to drop the armor of suspicion—of coldness, wherewith I had girded myself, and go back to the old way—to trust and believe hopefully, as the old Selene Barber, the girl who is so dead, had believed.

Presently, the chanting choir boys came in white-robed procession, scattering incense about the high altar. Once it would have seemed to me mere meaningless mummmery. In my present mood I understood—it was the ritual of sacrifice and oblation made for all our sins, that life here and hereafter may be full of hopeful light. Every sound, every waft of the censer, came straight home to me. By the time the minister arose to speak I was as responsive as a wind harp to the wind.

"Glory! Glory! Glory! Lord
God Almighty!

I read upon the sounding board above the high lectern. The arch of it seemed to my eyes like a halo about his head—a beneficent halo, full of cheer for the sorrowful. He prayed with power that seemed the power of

God himself. It thrilled me, filled me with a happiness so new, so strange, so wonderful, I bowed my head to hide the tears that welled over and rolled down my cheeks.

Text nor sermon I cannot set down, even in outline. When he read the last word of his set discourse he folded the written sheets, dropped them and leaned far over the pulpit to say something further. "The meaning of Christ," he said, "is love—is fellowship. Fellowship does not stand afar off. Instead, it comes close, it stretches out the hand, it invites you to share your burden with it, to let it ease you when you are over-spent. O, my brethren, there are more uses for hands than holding, and striking blows, and working the world's works, and gripping the world's wealth. Brothers hand in hand means brothers heart in heart.

"Shake hands all around—with the troubled in warm-hearted sympathy! The young, the discouraged, those who have small incomes and big expenses—give them of your strength by shaking hands. Shake hands with God's children as they set forth on that last unending journey! Across cradles, and graves, and deathbeds, shake hands. Shake hands with your enemies. So shall you save them from doing you hurt, defaming you, and harming themselves by pitiful efforts to harm you. Shake hands at the church door with strangers as well as friends. Shake hands pulpit and

pews! Shake hands Sunday with all days of the week! Shake hands earth and heaven! Only thus can Jesus—praise His holy name—be justified and His sacrifice avail! His love has no better measure, no better exponent, than a true and honest hand-shake. May He speed the hour when all men, high and low, rich and poor, shall shake hands across all chasms of condition; when nation shall stretch forth to shake hands with nation, and God Himself shake hands with His creature man.”

I heard him, awed and breathless. It must be I thought I had been sent to listen. Spiritual help I needed beyond all other things. Perhaps in the fullness of it I might also find the material help so long sought in vain. Perhaps I had lacked faith. Certainly I had tried vaingloriously to stand and work alone, hoping to triumph, to overcome in my own poor strength. Now I would ask God’s guidance through the lips of His chosen instrument. Faith and trust might bring me over the Hill Difficulty, where for so long my weary feet had been stayed.

All through the night the peace—that peace of God which passeth all understanding—remained to comfort me. I slept like a little child and awoke with a heart of hope. It seemed a year went before the hour when my worldly knowledge told me it would be meet to seek out the minister. I meant to go to him holding out my hand and saying simply, “I

have come for wisdom. Speak with me as your heart directs." Then I meant to tell him briefly of my sore need. Work alone I would ask for—any sort of work that would mean maintenance and a little free time. I was not like the singer—full of hope to profit by the pious folk. But I did think it might be in his power to speak some word which would open a door hitherto closed against me.

His house was easily found. It is big and fine and stands on the corner of a desirable residence street. But I rang its bell fearlessly. I was but one of God's lonely ones come to ask the help of God's people. They were active to save sinners. Though I was far from perfect I had not fallen to the depths, and they might care as much to keep me still out of them as they would to drag me back, once I had taken the plunge.

A man in livery opened the door—not wide, but stingily—so he could peer out without letting me see much within. He eyed me with disfavor before I opened my lips, when I said, "Tell the minister a woman wishes to see him about the Lord's business," the disfavor grew into positive disdain. "You—you better go talk to the church society about that," he said, sullenly, at last. "The minister he don't have time to bother with no cranks. If he took it he wouldn't have no time fer nothin' else much. You had better move along now. It ain't worth while asking him—I know he does not want to be troubled."

"I shall not trouble him in the least," I said. "But I am sure he will see me. At any rate, take him my card and say I am waiting. Meantime I should like to sit down—and I should not like to have you shut the door in my face."

He had been on the point of doing that, but something in my voice or manner stopped him. Very grudgingly he opened the door wide enough to admit me, and said, motioning me to a seat: "Stay there! I know he's busy—but I'll take him the card." Then as he went away he called to a smart housemaid, so loud I could not choose but hear, "Maria, keep your eye on the hall door, will you?"

"I've got the missis' breakfast to take up!" Maria retorted, with a toss of the head. As they both disappeared I looked about me in amazement. The hall was the very finest spot I had ever seen. Richly-carved wainscotings of rare Eastern woods ran all about it. Above them were old tapestries; the floor, of polished wood, was strewn with rugs which must have cost up in the thousands. They were genuine antiques, with the softness and the splendors of the far East breathing from them. The hall itself was so spacious as to bespeak great wealth—here in this city, where space is hardly less precious than rubies. There was a cabinet, also an antique, full of curios and carved gems. Tall, high-backed, carved chairs stood here and there. Either side the fireplace there were seats in tapestry-hung nooks. An

inlaid table some little way off upheld a mass of costly litter interspersed with new books.

A real fire of hardwood snapped and sparkled between the great brass fire-dogs. In front of it there was a magnificent tiger-skin, and on the wall at one side a collection of fire-arms. Evidently someone in the household was an ardent sportsman. It could hardly be the minister himself, I thought, still the matter was not vital. A man might love God and God's work entirely, yet not abate by one jot his keen relish for normal human pleasures. I had heard vaguely that the church this minister served was among the wealthiest in the city. It spoke volumes, I thought, for the good faith of his parishioners that they chose to have him live upon a scale of magnificence matching their own. No doubt, by making himself thus one with them he was able to influence them more powerfully—to rouse them more keenly to a realization of the privilege of wealth.

The insolent servants I thought I understood. The minister himself, of course, had not time to look after them; his wife was most likely a confirmed invalid. It was well on toward noon. Only an invalid or a very fashionable lady would be breakfasting in bed at that hour—particularly on Monday morning—Sunday evenings were bound to be kept holy in the household of this man of God. My heart rose up in pity and went out to him

afresh as I meditated. Here, no doubt, I reasoned, in this tribulation of his own heart, was one root of the wide, heart-reaching sympathy which had overflowed in his words and made my dry soul feel renewed. A door at my right opened and closed quickly. The minister came through it, holding the hand of a tallish, thin man, who was chuckling as though in great glee. I heard the minister say: "It is almost unpardonable—your not reaching the city a day earlier. We had a quiet little dinner last evening that only wanted your presence to make it perfect. Senator Talkwell, Doctor Greateye, Esperance, the novelist, you know, and two or three more nearly as good. My wife will be desolate over not seeing you; but you know how she values her health. We were up until two o'clock this morning, and she will have ten hours' sleep, no matter what happens."

"You should be glad of that—it keeps her the handsomest woman in the city," the tall man said, with his hand on the doorknob. The minister smiled beamingly and himself opened the door. He stood chatting with his guest a minute longer, then came in, half frowning, and turned, as if to re-enter the room he had just quitted. Suddenly his eye fell on me. He stopped short, stared; then, seeming to remember something that had escaped him, said, with superficial blandness: "Pardon me, madam—I had forgotten there was a—that

anyone was waiting. What can I do for you? I must ask you to be brief, as my time is very much taken up, and, at best, hardly my own."

"I came to shake hands," I said, looking fixedly at him. He continued to stare rather absently, but brightened a little, saying: "O! Then you heard me yesterday. Well, madam, if all who come to me were as easily satisfied my lot would be much happier than it is."

He came toward me, holding out his hand, his eyes full of well-stimulated warmth. I kept my hands down a minute, then raised one and dropped it in his palm, saying as I did it: "But that is not all I want. Can you not help me to join hands with some work?"

Instantly his face froze. He almost dropped my hand and stepped back a pace, motioning me away, as he said: "What sort of work? I—really—this is extraordinary. You must be a stranger. I leave all that sort of thing to the society. Go to them—at the parish house, you know—they attend to all these—ahem!—trivial details so my mind shall be free for—well, higher things."

"What are they? Your sermons?" I asked, quickly. Then, as I swung on my heel, I repeated, slowly: "'I was an-hungered, and ye gave me no meat; thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; naked, and ye clothed me not; sick and in prison, and ye visited me not.'"

"My church does all those things for me," he cried, impatiently. "I—you must know, no-

body thinks any more of taking Scripture literally. If you will come back Thursday I will listen to you a few minutes—”

“Thank you!” I said. “But God is so much closer, so much more accessible, I had rather go and talk to Him.”

How I got back to my poor shelter I do not know. I have a vague, confused memory of running, of becoming very tired, of seeing people as ghosts walking—then of falling down and sleeping almost as one dead. Out of the sleep I waked to a blackness of despair such as I have never known. Every door is shut—no escape is possible. I must sell myself—or die. There lies my only choice. I have eaten nothing all day, save a crust and a cup of milk at morning. Even yet I am not, I suppose, in the lowest depths. A girl I talked with the other day in a shop told me, her eyes flickering dully at the recollection: “Before I had regular work—I get six dollars a week now and do beautifully on it—but before that often all the breakfast I had was to stop on the grating over a bakeshop as I went looking for work and snuff the good, hot bread smell that came up to me.”

Tomorrow must decide it. Unless I find something, at evening I shall go—to the river or Deering. Choice would be easy only for the Vision. I could not sleep in the grave and leave it undone.

CHAPTER XX.

VALLERY WRITES:

New York City, April —.

The deed is done, my dear Bolton. On your head rests the responsibility. Deering is raging like a caged wild beast. As yet he only suspects my agency, so I have not suffered financially. He is, in spite of his delinquencies, too much a man, and—I had almost written—a gentleman, to act seriously upon a basis of suspicion.

Your protege—your unseen protege—perhaps I had better call her ours—is safe and at work. This, I know, will be good news to you. It has surprised me, well as I thought I knew you, to find how generously, how almost Quixotically, you have taken up her cause. I hope, indeed, I believe, she deserves it. Let me say, however, what is the frozen truth: I do not believe there is anywhere in the world another man who would do what you have done—interest himself in behalf of a perfect stranger to the extent of assuming a possible financial risk. It is like you—yet a little beyond what I expected even of you. Therefore I myself am all the more shamed. When your telegram came I had about made up my mind to let the whole thing go by the board as one

that I could not afford to meddle with. But when I read your message in a flash I saw myself as I really was—a selfish coward, masking cowardice as prudence.

Your way of putting things has a tonic quality. I hope I have shown myself at least “worth damning.” Maybe I shall even show myself, after a while, worth saving. Now, to get down to particulars—the helping hand was barely in time. I found Mrs. Barber desperate—white, calm, with burning eyes, and hands like ice. Something, I know not what, had impelled me to seek her just as soon as you made up my mind for me. On the way to her I dropped in on my fellow-conspirator. He hardly deserves to be called so, however, since he is a staid business man, whose only concern was to find a person peculiarly endowed for a very peculiar sort of work.

Still, more particularly, he is a big silk manufacturer, with artistic aspirations. He wants an unusual touch in his fabrics. In other words, he wants them to be out of the beaten track. I have known him since our college days and have often talked over his hobby with him while we smoked our after-lunch cigars. It was in one of these smokes the thought came to me—here is the place, the person to help Deering’s prey! She has the most exquisite color-sense—she could make undreamed-of color combinations. This man could and would pay her some part of what

they were worth to him—not munificently, of course, but enough to live on until she proves whether or no she is capable of anything more serious.

That is exactly what has come to pass. I stayed with her only long enough to give her an address and say, "Work awaits you there." You ought to have seen her face as she heard me. It is not a little unjust that I should have had the sight instead. She seemed to thaw, to come to life, to become all in a minute a woman, flushing, paling, panting in the stress of hope and joy. She was fully dressed for the street. "I was going out—to make an end of it all," she said, seeing my glance of faint astonishment at her readiness. Then she waited to say no more, but skimmed down the stairs and shot out of the door at a pace I could not equal. People in the street turned and stared after her. I did not wonder at it—her face was so illumined.

As I was leaving my office she ran into me, her face deadly pale, but her eyes glowing. "I had to come—to thank you," she said, breathlessly. "Sleep would have been impossible unless I had done it—and after today—I shall have no time. Thank you! Thank God for that!"

"I have done nothing!" I protested. She shook her head and looked at me, tears suddenly quenching the brilliance of her eyes. They made her positively irresistible—still I made

an effort to keep a level head. Do not despise me utterly for what is coming. It is part of our bond of friendship to speak only the truth and all the truth. I might have remained outwardly calm but for the woman herself—it is that same irrational and maddening innocence. She stooped, lithely, lightly, and touched my fingers with her lips. It was the gentlest, timid touch, such as a child might give a stranger who had suddenly given it a great and long-coveted pleasure.

Then—I caught her in my arms, and kissed the round of her white cheek. She shrank away from me with a low, hurt cry: “You, too! O, not you!” she said, looking at me with eyes full of pain. “I thought you, at least—have you forgotten what you told me first—about the one woman—the one little girl?”

“No,” I said, contritely. “I have not forgotten it—nor have I forgotten them. Dear Mrs. Barber, do forgive me. I—I meant no harm. But let me give you a bit of advice. However grateful you may feel, or however kindly, toward any man, never again make the mistake of forgetting that he is—a man—and fallible.”

“I shall not—but, O! I am so sorry!” she said, dropping her thick veil and walking away, while I called myself all manner of fools and gave ten minutes to thinking how I could make up to her for this last wholly needless hurt.

This is my conclusion: I can best atone by

keeping a careful eye on Deering. More, I will let him know that I am watching in her interest. If he does not like it he may lump it—and straightway take himself and his business to another office. Also, I shall see to it that his claim is paid—if I have to put money I cannot very well spare into the picture which is his security—if ever it is finished.

I have not seen her since. That was a week ago. Yesterday I talked awhile with Brentane, the silk man, and found that he has hope of her. "She is new and strange and frightened yet—she is so big it is not easy for her to fit herself into a new place," he said. "So far she has not done much that I care for. You see, I give her the color-cards of the season—the shades that are going to be fashionable—and bid her combine them and mingle them in every possible way. This she does on little squares of cardboard, which I look over next day. If any one of them appeals to me, seems specially effective, then I give it to the pattern-maker. After a while this new woman may herself make patterns—when she has learned to draw and the technical part of it. There is much more than even form and color in the matter of making a pattern, let me tell you. I pay her only for half-time—twenty dollars a week. On that she can live. I have given her a card also to the school we manufacturers have established. There she will get free the training she most needs. I have

looked over a pile of things she has been doing alone. It is through them, not her color-work for me, I know I have at last stumbled on exactly the woman I want."

"Has she the making of a great artist in her?" I asked. Brentane smoked on a minute, then half shook his head and said slowly: "A great artist, no. But it would not astonish me if she painted one great picture some of these days. A picture that was part of her life—herself. It will have to be something vague, something mystical—she will never at her age so far overcome want of early training as to do inspired work, dealing with realities. If she gets the right subject, the right mood, the right air and light all at once—then she may do something wonderful; but she will never do it again."

Brentane knows. He spent five years abroad knocking about among artists, intent to learn art secrets. In fact, he has himself the artist soul, but no facility whatever for giving it expression with his fingers. He was fairly rich to begin, and this manufacturing business is in a way the expression of his inner self. It has prospered in spite of some wild schemes of profit-sharing he set on foot several years back. His factory is outside the city—not in a place with the rest, but a green, tidy little village, half an hour out by train. I wish our protege might go to live there, but that is impossible. Brentane is in town most of the time, and all

the finer details of the business are conducted here. But she is in good hands—indeed, she could not possibly have fallen in better. Brentane is so wrapped in business he will see in her only his new colorist—never a woman of unusual charm.

I am writing thus at length that you may know everything. Answer in the same fashion—tell me if you approve, and further, what you think of this plan: Let us two, through a non-committal third party, free Selene Barber from Deering's clutches, send her abroad for five years, and take our chances of getting our money back when she succeeds. It would cost rather more than I alone can spare, or I should have undertaken it alone. Let me hear from you at convenience—she will do very well where she is at present. Forgive this long epistle—and much that it contains. For the rest, I am as always.

Faithfully,
VALLERY.

CHAPTER XXI.

BOLTON WRITES:

Milltown, Ill., May —.

My Dear Vallery:

I have taken time to think before answering you. Understand, I am not dogmatizing, but this seems to me to be incontrovertible truth—the one thing more deplorable than the fact that women work outside the shelter of a home is the cruel necessity that drives them to it. I myself employ women by scores, with my conscience all the time protesting. I had ever so much rather pay men enough to enable them to marry, to take care of wives, and make a provision for possible daughters, but what will you? There is competition; there are the laws of trade—ever so many big things—far too big for individual effort to upset them, right in the way.

Nothing hurts me more than to realize, as I do so very often, that while men must work, women, in the main, must work and weep. They are ground betwixt the upper and nether millstones of human nature and our complex modern civilization. If when she becomes a worker she could cease to be a woman, retaining only feminine aptitudes and deftness after the manner of the working bees, then life

would be spared its most tragic spectacles—for example, such as that which you have been showing me at second hand.

You do yourself injustice. I am certain the Francis Vallery I know would never have been the coward to let a woman be crushed for any fear of financial loss. Money is not everything—recollect, old man, how we used to debate that point when our allowances ran short at the old university. We were callow and self-sufficient, after the manner of such lads, but on the whole we often stumbled on sound doctrine and pretty deep philosophies. Life has at least taught me that much. It has not taught me to forget, either, how the boy Frank Vallery knocked down the braggart son of a multimillionaire because he insulted a washer-woman's pretty daughter. City life is a hardening and in some ways a devitalizing process, but I shall never believe any amount of it can change the elemental chivalry of my friend into calculating prudence.

I should have been certain of you without your confession. Oh, Vallery, Vallery! The old Adam must be strong in you! Do not think, though, I shall mock at you or sermonize—again, life has taught me the inevitability of such stumblings in the higher way. The man never lived who was beyond temptation. Susceptibility is very largely a matter of temperament—and you were born susceptible in the last degree. I myself am differently cast. My

life has not been spotless—Heaven knows there are many things in it I would wipe out if I could. As I cannot, I must atone for them as best I may. But this I can say: So far as regards women, there is no one of them who has ever suffered hurt or insult or oppression at my hands. Only a few of them have the power to move me. I am wondering, by the way, if our protege would attract or repel me. I have sometimes a wish to see her and find out. Then my mind changes. I am sure it is best that we remain strangers. I pity her deeply. She seems to have had rather more than her share of troubles. If I were omnipotent, with my present finite mind, no woman, good or bad, should ever have trouble of any kind more than the fact of womanhood.

If you look at it rightly, Vallery, that is in itself a tremendous handicap. Think what it must be to be born helpless? Women have hands, ears, eyes, organs, dimensions—yes, and aspirations, and passions—much the same as men. They know the spur of ambition, the sting of emulation, quite as well as the restfulness of love and the sweetness of maternity; yet, unless they would shame their womanhood, they must exist largely in the passive voice. As between men, I believe “the gifts of the gods are equal,” but woman’s is quite another story. They are forced into the race carrying weight from the start, and often the

winning means more shame to them than the losing.

This being the case, I hold—and try to live up to my holding—that it is every man's bounden duty to protect a woman wherever, whenever and however he can—even if needs must he protect her from herself. It is further his duty to help within the straight and narrow limits of the allowable. That is to say, to help her by giving her fair work, fair usage, fair wages, by putting her womanhood out of open consideration in all matters of bargaining—in fact, to give her simply a white man's chance to do whatever it may be necessary for her to undertake. Open help—loans that are practically gifts, indulgences and that kind of thing, are disadvantages. In the first place, they always carry in the world's mind so much of compromising suggestion they require to be done in secret. The big old world may be hard—in individual cases it often is—but in the main it is right eleven times out of twelve. Things begun in the purest kindliness oftentimes drift on to dire disaster. I have seen homes, and lives, too, wrecked, by the finest virtues of manly natures, and that, too, without designed fault on the part of the woman.

You will understand why I say no, at least in part, to your plan for this woman who interests us. Let her stay where she is. There, if anywhere, she may work out her own salvation. But keep watch as you have suggested.

If Deering makes a move to take our distressed queen give him check, if it cost ten thousand to do it. Draw on me for whatever you need, marking the draft "Letter B," so I shall understand. As to the money for sending her abroad, that shall be forthcoming whenever she is ready for it. She is not ready now unless I wholly misunderstand the situation. She would go oppressed, timorous, and lacking hope. Once let her feel that she has achieved something—that she stands where she stands in right of her own strength—and she will be able to profit by all the old world or the new can offer her.

I need not say keep under cover about this. You know, even better than I, how fatal it is to the best intentions to have it known that they center and circle about a beautiful woman. You need not answer at once—I am off for the Golden Gate tomorrow, and shall not be back before mid-August. Then I shall likely look you up at the seashore, or wherever I may find you; of course, they will know your location at the office. Make my compliments to your wife, and tell my sweetheart she must wear overalls and romp like a boy all summer so she will grow up in a hurry. I am getting lonely out here and tired of bachelor existence. Ask her if she thinks she cannot manage the growing up in the next five years. I found a gray hair yesterday—and am getting crow feet underneath my right eye.

Seriously, I begin to feel the mistake of staying a bachelor. It is too late now to remedy it—all the same, it is a mistake. And there is no reason in the world why I should have made it. I have not the ghost of a romantic memory to excuse it, and as to ways and means I could have looked out for two since the first year I set to work for one. It must be the right woman did not come within range. Or, maybe, there is no right woman for me. I may be of the luckless ones born odd. However that may be, I shall not speculate further over the matter. Still—this big house is lonesome. It would be lievelier with the patter of little feet all through it.

Goodbye. If I do not get back from this journey you will find I have not overlooked my little sweetheart in the division of things. Give her a kiss for me. I have also left you ten thousand in trust. If anything should happen to me you will know what to do with it. This is all, except that I am,

Sincerely your friend,

RICHARD BOLTON.

* * * * *

SELENE WRITES:

New York City, February —.

A mood of memory possesses me. I will open the book I shut, as I thought, forever, so many months ago. Not to record all that has

come and gone. Some things I would forget—others my soul keeps too sacredly to profane them with a visible transcript. Here or there I shall rough in a bit—blurred and hasty, yet sufficient, since no other eyes are to see it.

I have turned back, glancing along the pages forewritten. It was not well done—the heartbreak in many of them all but laid hold on me anew. And this new peace, this helping sanity and calm, is far too precious to be lightly risked. Thank God for work—it has meant so much more to me than life. I was at the very end of endurance when it came. At first I was too fearful to do well that which it had been given me to do. Thank God afresh—He let my courage come back to me. Now I take up my tools with serene confidence that I shall not hold them in vain.

I have grown to love it—the work that at first seemed so narrow, so paltry. I have grown, too, to understand something of the impersonal art-love which is life to Mr. Brentane. I see him but rarely—only when I have either pleased or disappointed him very much. Indeed, I am a kind of hermit here in my airy room, high above everything, with only my colors, my cards, and my sheets of white paper. I mean they are my implements—the walls are full of casts, and prints, and tiny statuettes, and bit of exquisite-hued old china that is in itself an inspiration. At first I climbed up to it every morning, but after a

month Mr. Brentane said, almost harshly: "You lose time and strength coming—why not stay here all the time?"

There was no reason, so I stay now. I have three rooms all my own. The building is all his—and he does not grudge me this space, otherwise wasted. Two flights down there is the big hall, where every day but Sunday betwixt October and May the designing classes meet, and work. To me they have proved a true godsend. At last I have taught my stubborn fingers a knack of something like obedience to my instructed will.

This is the largest room in my workshop. Here I sit for six hours studying shades and colors, dreaming, experimenting, dashing tints that swear at each other violently together, and interposing a third which somehow brings them into harmony. It is odd, but I do best with raw primary tints. Once or twice Mr. Brentane has said, with a grim smile: "You must be a kind of sorceress. That combination is as impossible as it is beautiful and daring." Then I have made the patterns—not perfect ones, of course—I am not yet up to that; but patterns which showed how the raw reds and blues and vivid violets might be made to soften and subdue each other into something like Eastern richness.

Brentane says I have the Eastern eye—barbaric, yet harmonious beyond description. I smile inly when he says it, thinking there may

be really something of the Orient about me. Earle always swore there was—and Deering—

Oh, why have I let his name creep in? I have sworn to forget him, until that good day dawns when I can know myself free. I hope it is not so far away, though it is months since I touched the Vision. I am letting my dream grow and ripen as my hand learns more and more the cunning of true art. Regularly every quarter I let his attorney know that the picture is "still unfinished," and ask if my creditor cares to examine it. So far he has not done it. I hardly ever see him, indeed. Once I met him as I was coming here. He halted me, and said, with a sarcastic smile: "When it comes to choice betwixt me and Brentane, Selene, remember I am likely to die first—and able to leave you richer."

"When it comes to a choice," I answered—"why, there remains always the river! I was on the point of going to it, when work came. Please leave me in peace, so long as I can work."

He swung about and left me, with a blacker scowl than ever. He is not friends with Mr. Vallery now, though Vallery is still his man of business. I fancy he hates everyone who helped in my escape from him. If he only knew certainly that it was really death I escaped I wonder if he would be so bitter and angry?

Mr. Vallery I see now and again. He is

cramped in my presence—as I am in his. That is not strange—considering—what I shall not consider. But after all is said and done, he is truly kind. Once he brought his little girl to see me, and he tells me over and over: “If Deering stirs a finger, let me know it at once. I’ve a knight that can settle that gentleman without help of even a pawn.”

I do not quite know what he means—it must be something about chess—a game I have always hated. I do not care to know accurately—because I understand that he will fight for me if that other man makes me trouble. That he will never need to do it is now my dearest hope. I am not by nature combative—now all I crave is to be left in peace.

Last night I dreamed of Earle. Ah, me! How dim and far off he seems now! I can hardly believe myself the same Selene Barber that agonized and wept for him, that would have been trampled in the dust for his glory, but could not bear to help him sink his better self. I did love him—better than I shall ever love any other man. I doubt, indeed, if another love is possible—my heart is like a dead thing, so far as relates to thrills and raptures. If he came to me tomorrow—in my dream he did come—imploring me to be his wife, in the face of all the world, I think I should turn away from him to keep on with my work. In the dream I heard his voice, I felt his touch—yet all the feeling evoked was a wish that he

would go and leave me. And only three years back his smile was more to me than sunlight—his image came always between me and my God. I was old enough, certainly, to have loved with the love of a life. I think I did love Earle so—but love, at least in my heart, is neither an air-plant nor an immortelle. 'Tis true, 'tis pity—and pity 'tis, 'tis true! I can only admit the truth. Denial would make it none the less pitiful.

If I had married him I wonder if this same disillusionment would have befallen? I think not. Mine is a constant nature, not light and fickle. Sheltered by home walls, fed by home duties, I am sure the flame of my love would have burned forever pure and bright. Now, like the ballad heroine—

“I care for nobody, no not I!
For nobody cares for me!”

But I do care very much for one thing—success, which is another name for independence and honest maintenance. For that I live now, and hope, and work, and plan. One of the plans I shall put in execution very soon. It is a little, tiny one—yet may have big results. I have found out in part the mysteries of rug patterns. A successful one, I am told, is worth a good many hard dollars. And I have dreamed out one that cannot fail of success. That is ever so much better than wasting my dream-

time on lovers, past or prospective. This dream is going down on paper Sunday. Commonly I spend the day somehow in the open—in the parks, or on the river, or in a solitary excursion some little way out of town. Church has not seen me since the day of shaking hands. I read my Bible daily, and try to draw spiritual strength from it, in my own poor way. Thus I am assured I do not break the commandment to keep the Sabbath holy. Only good thoughts come to me, under the sky or in the face of the glad green earth. Works of charity and necessity the strictest churchman may do. It is a work of necessity—this of mine. I need a whole long day to do it well—and I have no other day free.

If my pattern brings me a hundred dollars—why! I am like the milkmaid—even more foolish than she. I have saved a little money already—if I can earn more, outside my regular stipend, I shall put it aside sacredly to be spent among the hills. Those far, blue southlying Virginia hills haunt me. I must see them once more—somehow they seem to hold my Vision somewhere in their enchanted depths. To go and find it, and bring it away in my heart so my hand may body it forth—this is my one day-dream. To think it hinges upon the possibilities of a pattern as yet undrawn!

* * * * *

New York, December —.

My hand shakes so I can hardly write. I am glad—glad to the tiniest fibre of my being. Money is a sordid thing—often I have felt that I despised it. Yet now I am so glad because of money I could dance like a child. It is not so much money, either—only two hundred dollars, the price of my pattern. But it means more—as much more—I have another pattern in mind and as good as sold. I shall work and wait! O! I shall be good and patient. Until the summer is strong and full I shall not let myself even think of the hills. But when I begin thinking—ah! then I shall fly away to them—I shall forget color-cards and all their works, and bathe my soul in the pure beauty of sun and sky and swelling blue distances, and sweeping valley lines.

After that—I cannot say. Mr. Brentane is most kind in his dry, unhuman way. “I think you are getting restless for work—real work,” he said to me the other day. “When you feel you cannot bear pressure any longer—tell me. It may be I can spare you half a year for what is in you.”

Work! Work! Work That is my touchstone, my talisman, the one thing that is truly vital in all my days. I have not time or strength for even you, my thrice-faithful confidence-keeper. When I come to talk with you again the whole face of the world may have changed.

CHAPTER XXII.

VALLERY WRITES:

New York City, August —.

My Dear Bolton:

Have you any curiosity? I believe you hold it a vice of civilization—still, you cannot wholly have escaped it. At any rate you must be mildly anxious to know something of a person concerning whom you have heard much and said something this last two years. I mean, of course, Mrs. Barber. I have seen her myself but once in six months. That was a fortnight back. I called on her as Deering's legal mouthpiece, to ask about that unlucky picture of hers. Deering, I am confident, hates me. He no doubt keeps me because he thinks that his employment of me professionally in a measure stands between me and Selene's full friendliness. Deering has just sailed—gone abroad for an indefinite stay. He may stay five years. It would, however, surprise me less if he came back on the next steamer. He has not pined in loneliness for the woman he is pursuing—still his madness for her is as hot as ever. He has grown stouter a good deal this last year—balder, too, and coarser all round. To offset that, he has been lucky in the market—you do not need to be told he has cleaned up another half-million. He himself

says he is "well-heeled for Paris." I believe he would give up Paris and the half-million both—for a certain person in whom we are interested.

I have a genius for wandering statement to-day. That person, as I began saying in the beginning, is now where you can see her, and talk with her, easily and without the least awkward premeditation. Take the F. F. V. one of these fine days and visit the old springs of Virginia; you will find her somewhere thereabouts. She means to stay until November, so there is no great need of haste. I am letting you know thus early so you may arrange to spare a fortnight for that particular diversion. Do not try to do the thing hurriedly. Take my word that she is worth studying—and give your whole mind to doing it. When you have seen her write me. If you were any other than yourself I should not advise as I do—I would be sure the report would run: "I came, I saw, I was conquered." But you are like nobody in the world but yourself—and I am almost morbidly curious as to how you will be impressed with this woman, who has bowled over several other types of the human male so very completely.

It may interest you to know Brentane is still proof against her charms, and further, that he sticks to his opinion of her artistic capacities, in the face of very considerable achievements on her part. She will, according

to him, be able henceforth to maintain herself well, even handsomely, making patterns and doing purely decorative work. I am sure you will be glad to know it. I am sure, too, if Deering turns rusty upon his return, you will fall in with a plan I have—that we shall become her joint creditors, and give her her own time and way of working out of debt.

But before everything else, go and see her for yourself. You can easily make a valid excuse for such going. There are fish and game galore in those Virginia mountains. Though you are a very mild type of Nimrod, still you can handle a gun upon occasion. Unless you think I might be in the way, I should be glad to join you there. Now, do not look suspicious—I have no shadow of ulterior motive. I am henceforth and for always Mrs. Barber's friendly well-wisher. If you want my company, telegraph after you get there. I will come on the next train—if the case is urgent. Until I see you, goodbye—but do not fail to let me know the whole truth. The girl is growing at a great rate—in fact, she feels so old nowadays she has bidden me to tell you as gently as I may that she really thinks you need not count on her any more—she wants a nice, pink-cheeked sweetheart, just as big as herself. Considering how the feminine mind inclines to continuing conquest, I think the message shows I have brought the young person up to have something of conscience. I came

near forgetting it—but if you find yourself experiencing any qualms at sight of Mrs. Barber, why, you can go in to win, with a knowledge you are entirely free—at least, so far as my family is concerned.

This postscript — or, rather, postulate—threatens to run feminine length. I shall stop short—as always. Yours,

VALLERY.

* * * * *

(Telegram.)

Clifton Forge, Va., September —.
Vallery, New York City:

Caesar not in it. Stay away on pain of instant death. Have found Venus Victrix.

Yours, etc.,

BOLTON.

* * * * *

SELENE WRITES:

Heart of the Hills, October —.

I am awake! I am alive again! My heart sings for joy—joy in the sunlight, the hills, the million beauties all around me. It has been a wonderful thing—this revivification. It began, I think, when I knew the wide blue ocean rolled between me and my evil genius—Deering. A weight seemed to lift, an evil spell to fall away—my eyes were no more held from the subtle beauties of even the commonest things. My hand grew firm and free. Better

still, I could make it do nearly what I would. My heart likewise grew bold. I said in it: "I will be happy—happy as God meant me to be." So I put on my black garments—I have worn the garb of mourning ever since that day when it seemed I signed away some part of my soul. Even Brentane, the unnoting, was struck with the change in me. He was also very kind. "You need freedom—take it for at least a while," he said—and I obeyed.

Ah! How the hills, my dear hills, received me! They had, I am sure, hidden their royal splendors until I came. Never were there such dim, sweet purples unrolled along them—such far heights of faery set up on their crests. The winds sang the lowest, wierdest, most enchanting melodies, and as I listened I saw their notes as the most wonderfully radiant hues. It is curious—the way my mind translates all impressions into color. A bird note is clear, dawn-pink, or the palest, melting lilac; rippling water sounds golden, and the rustle of ripe grasses pure royal purple. Likewise it seems to me I can hear the colors—it is not a mere figure of speech to say that such and such of them swear at each other. They whisper to me the most wonderful things—if only I could translate the whispers into common speech then I should be reckoned a poet.

Truce to speculations, to nice subtleties. Here in the hills the delights of languor laid hold upon and possessed me. For a month I

did not so much as think of work—only lay at length in the sun or the shadow, letting the marvel, and the glory of it all do their perfect work. Silently, I felt that something was coming—something which would be epochal. I did not, I could not dream it was life itself—new life, fresh and wonderful, thrilling from the soul of nature, our mother.

It is more than wonderful thus to be born again. Sometimes I fear I am dreaming, and pinch myself hard to make sure I am awake. As I grow more and more into the light all the darkness between comes like a dream—a bad dream, one that I remember vaguely as one long, shuddering chill.

I can laugh at it, in this new strength, which came as suddenly as the languor had come, and set me quivering with the impulse to do, to create, to fix and make real all the fine inner essence of light and glow my soul was so raptly discerning. Then, and then only, I brought out my Vision. It had been dark and shrouded for a whole year. The sight of it aroused a curious sensation—partly pity for anything so ill-done, partly hope for anything so excellently conceived. For I could read through all the lines of failure the promise of success. It was with my picture as with myself—I had first much to undo before real work was possible.

How I fell to work on it! Never until then did I taste the full rapture of action. Now I

think I know something of the exaltation possible to a hero, who gives his life for the achievement of a great deed. He has the world's applause, its honors, and, maybe, very much beside, but none of them can compare with what wells up in his own heart to sweeten and sanctify the actual doing. It is worth dying for—nay, it is even worth having lived for if life brought nothing else.

Clifton Forge has fair hills about it, but something told me a fairer world lay beyond. So I set out to find it—and, behold, here it is! I have chanced upon the loveliest cup-shaped valley in the very edge of the mountain swells. Springs well out to gather into a brook, then run away in a fairy cascade through a narrow, deeply-shaded gorge. It is barely wide enough for a mill road beside the babbling water. All along either hillside there are ferns, and mossy ledges, and trails of lusty vines. Down below the ground is carpeted with clean, sweet-smelling leaves. Here or there you see flowers—gentian clusters, asters of a hundred sorts, golden rod—this only where the sun breaks through—and waxen clusters of the mystic Indian pipe. It is all enchanting, yet far less so than the valley itself. It is all one farm, and no very big one. The house is low and gray and square, a picture of homely thrift and comfort. It stands on a little rise at the valley's farthest verge. Back of it the hills go up and up to a perfect

pinnacle. From the top of it one can see fifty miles up and down the range. The charm of it is that for such viewing you must seek one particular spot—a bald, stony place, a little westering, where the hills fall so deeply down they are almost precipitous. Thick growths of laurel and wild azalea hedge it about, and a huge leaning chestnut shades it at mid-day, yet it no-wise shuts out the view.

There, in that green seclusion, I began my work anew, companioned only by silence and the hills. I could not wish for better company. No soul, indeed, could have better. It was a kind of inspired isolation. I would not have exchanged it for anything short of heaven itself. I came to the hill-top in time to see the sunrise, and stayed there until I had watched the sun go down, amid splendors no eye might endure, no tongue or pen describe. All the pretty, shy, wild creatures seemed to welcome me—velvet-footed rabbits came to nibble at tender shoots, gray squirrels, and red ones, frolicked and scampered up and down the chestnut boughs, quail piped clear at mid-day and sent out their feeding cry at morning, ruffed grouse whirred past me as though on purpose to catch my eye. Then the butterflies came in clouds—tiny white and big yellow ones—and when the sun was hot the big, gold-dusty humble bees droned all about. Wood wasps and dragon flies, too, darted here and there, striking out fine, fairy, metallic shim-

mers in the glancing sunshine. Watching the flashing of their translucent wings, I said, in my heart: "So light, so translucent, must be the wings of angels in my Vision."

Everything came to that until—but I had better tell that part consecutively,—it is the most wonderful of all. Whether he sought me, or how he found me, I shall perhaps never know. I mean Richard Bolton—the man who must forever stand apart from, above, all other men. He came upon me one day, as I stood pondering before my canvas. There was a gun in his hand, but one look at his eyes told me he had no pleasure in the death of anything. I ought to have been startled, or, at the very least, suspicious. So much, at least, I owed to experience—but I was neither of those things.

"You look tired. Rest, or the view will take away your breath," I said, motioning him to a place upon my Navajoe blanket, which was spread on a convenient ledge. He bowed gravely and asked: "Will you keep on working if I do?"

"Certainly. Why not?" I flung back at him, making a quick stroke with a fine sable brush.

"I should hate to disturb you—yet I do not want to go away," he answered. I smiled at his frankness. "Then you need not do it," I said. "The mountains are not mine—except by the right of those who love them well. I wish they were mine—so I could make the

whole world of hill-lovers welcome to them each year."

He flung down his gun and eyed it with something like disgust. "I have been carrying useless weight, I see," he said. "And that is something which always spoils my temper. There is so much one is forced to carry it is a pity to waste strength."

I nodded. "Yes—I have been finding that out experimentally in the last six weeks. Henceforth I mean to be wiser—and let each day answer for each day's burdens."

"That is right," he said, heartily, then got up and held out his hand. I put mine within it, and was thrilled by the clasp it met. In a little while we were talking like old, old friends. Indeed, from the first he gave me no sense of strangeness—I felt I had known him well always, and that he had likewise known me.

I was too happy to wonder over it. His coming was the last touch to my felicity. He had found quarters in the farm house that sheltered me. What his business or his pleasure was I did not try to find out. I do not know even yet—though I know many other things. One of them is that Richard Bolton is the truest, the noblest, and the manliest man alive.

I learned that something in this fashion: After ten days of comradeship—the most stimulating comradeship in the world—he said, as he stood watching my flying brush: "Do not put

all your life on that canvas, Selene. It is too precious—I want a part in it myself.”

I turned troubled eyes upon him. A sick dread filled my heart. He had grown to be something to me—something precious to my starved and fainting heart. Nature had brought it back to life, and human kindness had made it beat warmly, as of old. But it had done with lovers and loving—I wanted a friend—I thought I had found one—must I lose him just as I discovered his true worth? Perhaps he read all this in my glance. At any rate, he came a step nearer, but did not offer to touch me, as he said: “Do not be frightened. I am very patient. I can wait for years—if only it is a hopeful waiting. I am going to ask, Selene, what I have never before asked any woman:—will you be my wife? Not at once, of course. You know nothing about me—you have not thought of it. I had no need to think. The moment I saw you I knew. But women are different—”

“Very different!” I broke in. “As different as I, an exceptional woman, am to women in the mass. Before you go further with what you have to say, listen; you may not care to go on when you know.”

Then, in quick, tempestuous words, I told him—everything—of John, of Earle, of Deering, of my hard fight, my despair, my rescue, my hope of ultimate triumph. He listened, his face growing bright and brighter all the

while. When I wound up "Now you know all—my worst enemy can tell you no more," he smiled, and said, bending his head, as though in reverence: "No matter what was said, Selene, nor who said it, I should never believe it against the witnessing of your eyes."

Poor eyes! Tears suddenly drowned them. It was so long since I had heard words of trustful faith. Bolton took my hand tenderly between his own two broad palms, and said, as he pressed it lightly: "Selene, will you try to love me? Just a very little?"

"I would give half my life to love you as you deserve," I said, my voice shaken in the effort to choke down a big, dry sob. He let go my hand, folded his arms, and said:

"I am the best judge, dear, of my own deserts—I know myself rather better than you do. And if I can be satisfied with whatever it may please you to give—"

"Don't! Please!" I said, putting out my hand in appeal. "I cannot listen to you—I cannot think of anything except work until—until I am free. If I ever am—why! then—"

"Then," he echoed softly. I could not answer him. After a moment of tense silence he said, turning away his head as though he feared his gaze might wound: "If—if only you will let me, Selene, I will make this debt of yours mine—and pay it," his lips tightening a little over the last word.

"I do not doubt that—but I can never let

you," I said. "Unless I pay it myself I can never feel truly free. That man's hateful eyes would haunt me, would poison the sweetness of everything. He must see, he must be made to see, that I have worked my way through his meshes."

"I think I understand," he said, simply. "So understanding I cannot urge you further. But, at least, give me this promise if your heart will let you:—when you are free—"

He stopped, and looked at me steadily. I gave him my hand. "When I am free, by my own strength," I said, "you shall be the first to know it."

"I will come—if you call me—across half the world," he said. "Now I shall go away and leave you to work out your victory."

He went, never even looking back. That was three days ago. I miss him, more than words can tell—yet I am glad he has gone. Away from him I am not shamed to let his face mingle in my dreams of the future. I do not love him—not as I loved Earle. I do not love him in any way—but I do trust and look up to him, and feel that in him there is a rock of steadfastness, a tower of manly strength.

But I have put all thought of love or marriage aside. My work, my Vision, calls me, enthralls me. I see its ineffable glories float and circle across the darkness and the light. I will make them visible to other eyes—not as I see them—mortal colors and canvas can

never, never do that—but in such fashion that men shall know it is worth while to look again. And beyond the glow and the glories lies for me the fair prospect of freedom.

How will it be, I wonder, when the city again swallows me up? Mr. Brentane must do without me—I must work, work, while the soul of the mists and the mountains abides with me. *Plein air* is, I believe, the art jargon for it. Ah, me! Life is neither broad enough, nor deep enough, nor high enough to truly voice the true and beautiful soul of art—yet the shallow practitioners of it think they can speak the last word. I have no strength to spend in quarreling with them—no strength for anything but work—and hope.

Today there came a scrawl from Deering. Once it would have set me wild. Now I brush it away as I might brush a buzzing and intrusive stinging insect. “‘Art is long—and time is fleeting.’ Selene, you are teaching me the full meaning of that line. I am coming home in the spring. Please understand that then it must be play or pay.” I am so glad the letter waited until Bolton was away. If he had seen it—but I would never have let him rush into trouble. Indeed, upon second thought, I am sure he would not have done it. He understands better than I can tell him that anything he might do to defend or to avenge me would, save in the last extremity, hurt me more than it helped.

I have answered Deering: "It shall be play or pay." I wonder how he will read the line. But I must get him out of my thoughts—if I let myself dwell upon him I shall lose one of my last precious days in the heart of the hills.

* * * * *

New York City, January —.

My life hangs in the balance. If I should fail—but I will not name failure even to my own conscience. The heart of the hills abides with me—even here in the grimy town, shimmering, shining, melting in light or darkness, into the shimmering, the shinings, the shadows of the golden walls, the jasper streets, the river of the pure water of life, the wonderful sea of glass.

My Vision is compact of all of them—the effort of a soul caught in the whelming splendors of the whole magnificent allegory to spread out for other eyes some part of its own blessed realization. I can hardly bear to leave it long enough to sleep. Indeed, in these days the cumberings of mortality bear hard.

Hope alone sustains me under the fearful strain. I dare not let myself think of anything but triumph. Triumph has a new meaning, a still more delightful sweetness, since I have met Bolton. He writes—but I do not answer him. Still I know he is content. It turns out that he knows Vallery—what if I had listened to his love, without telling him the whole truth! All unconsciously, I was

wise there—even crafty-wise. It is so strange—but the more I think of him the more I recognize his many excellencies, the more doubtful I grow, in my own mind, as to whether or no, if I were free, I should care to take what he can give me!

And he can give so much! His wife will be able to hold her head high among the best in the land. It is certainly petty in me, yet the keenest emotion I feel regarding him—I mean the thing which touches me most nearly, is a sense of triumph in the fact, for fact it undoubtedly is, that his position is as much beyond Earle Brewster's as the Barcelona folk thought Earle's was ahead of mine.

I should be ashamed to confess as much—but from the beginning I have made no half-confidences to you, O, patient pages! Then I have never posed as a paragon, devoted to Duty and Earnestness, with capital letters. I am nothing but a woman, full of human foibles, strength, and weakness—so full, indeed, that often I wonder if Fate was not unkind when she did not make me a farmer's wife, and let me spend my life in mothering things—flowers, and animals, and children.

Ambition should be made of sterner stuff—still, I am deadly ambitious. It is the result of soul-transmutation, most likely. Feelings denied their proper and normal outlet often turn into strange channels. I am prosing here tonight, for example, because I wanted very

badly to do something else. It was to wrap myself in hood and cloak and dash out into the streets, where a heavy snow is falling. As a child that was my dear delight—to stand and let the flakes pelt my face till it stung, then drop down in a drift, and roll, as a beast rolls in the dust. It must be atavism—in some ways I am strangely near my savage ancestors a thousand years back. I had painted, painted, until the early dark made work out of the question. These days I cannot fix my mind on a book—and to sit dreaming in front of my grate was quite as impossible.

The wind called to me, and the snow flakes tapped invitation against my window panes. If I had heeded my world would have thought me mad. True, I might have gone into the park and strayed away from prying eyes. But the effort, the premeditation, would have made my frolic too business-like to be worth while. Desperately I have opened my locked book. Good, silent friend! How often you have helped me! How often you have drank in my revelations, saying never a harsh word of criticism or condemnation!

Tonight I have a curious sense of finality. I mean to write here very many other things—yet am impressed that this writing is the last. Yet half the pages are still fair, white paper. I shall use up three of them to set forth, briefly, the case of Selene Barber versus Fate.

Selene Barber, a woman, not wholly ill-

looking, over thirty, loving life, and God, and little children, has been strangely withheld from the average womanly destiny, partly by something within herself, but more by the Fate which we call Chance.

Now she stands at the parting of three ways. Which of them is it ordained she shall tread? Fate alone can answer.

If she succeeds—?

The years unroll before her as a fair vista studded thick with all delights. Honor is there, and companionship of choice spirits, and, it may be, love. To achieve success she has done all she could—has toiled, has suffered, has put away the delights of life. She is not wholly answerable either for the conditions which make success now so imperative. What she did was done in all innocence—Fate may, however, plead against that—that ignorance is no excuse in the eye of the law.

If she fails—?

She had much better die—the sternest moralist could not deny that, once he had an intimate comprehension of things. Failure means to her loathed luxury all the days of her life—means oppression as of a nightmare, insult, it may be,—and the falling away from all she has striven so hard to keep fast.

If she dies—?

Not cowardly because she wills it, but happily because God wills it—then! O, then! rest and peace, and the ending of all strife! She

has no fear of death—she would welcome him as a bridegroom, if he came in the glow of triumph. But she cannot seek his refuge wilfully—she is pledged to another way. Perhaps she is straining points, but here lies the sting of it all. She cannot die, she cannot take kindly succor, because—because she has pledged herself, her poor woman-self, to her enemy, as the gage of success. Unless she can succeed she belongs to him, body and soul. It is a fearful bargain—one better broken than kept casuists will say. She knows better. This part of the bargain may be unwritten—but she made it, accepted it, with open eyes. From that fact there is no appeal.

Still—she would not be human, much less a woman, if she did not feel a certain potential grudge against Fate.

CHAPTER XXIII.

The Spring Exhibition of the Society of the Fine Arts that year came very near working a miracle. It was not a canvas miracle—notwithstanding there was more than one notable picture. But when the *Earth* said of a particular painting: “The Vision of St. John (S. Barber, pinxit) is almost epochal, combining as it certainly does the charm of realism with the most exalted impressionism, and both suffused with the very life of light,” and the *Diurnal* echoed, “A new artist, one S. Barber, of whom no one appears to have ever heard before, has given the Society the success of this season in a big canvas, entitled the Vision of St. John,” then those wise in the ways of newspapers opened their eyes and pricked up their ears, well knowing as they did that the serious business of life in the *Earth* office was to controvert whatever the *Diurnal* asserted, and that the *Diurnal* likewise proclaimed in action, if not in set words, that its reason of being was to plague, hamper, and belittle the *Earth*.

Alone neither's word meant anything to the discerning. Together it meant something unmistakable. All the more that the *Blazer*, a sheet always conscientiously flippant, said: “The Vision of St. John, from a new hand, is

one of those very big pictures that would be great pictures if only the painters of them knew enough to boil them down—to get their undeniable effects from less than an acre of canvas, and to so strengthen the light that never was on sea or land as to make it illumine the artist's presumable intent."

The *Curule Chair*, which posed as an artistic oracle because it was always as conscientiously dull as the *Blazer* was flippant, damned the Vision with faint praise: "S. Barber, who is new, and, in most things, raw, shows a color-sense that if hereafter properly directed may mean something." This dictum the *Evening Mail Bag* quoted with mild approval, preferring to say nothing upon its own account.

It was the *Tabard*, always eccentric, always incalculable, which took the Vision of St. John under its protection, and exploited it, with all the trumpets playing. This not through superior discerning on the part of the *Tabard's* critic, but because that astute person had several scores to settle with artists who fancied themselves famous, and had, further, a realizing sense of the pains and pangs it would cost those gentlemen to find their own glory obscured by a newly risen star.

Strangers coming into the city and New Yorkers returning to it have equally the habit of looking into the morning's *Tabard* to find out what is going on. The sheet's vagaries are well known to be matched only by its

profits—notwithstanding, those two classes feel that it is indispensable. Thus it came about that two men read of the Vision, at nearly the same minute, and with nearly equal gnawings of discomfort. The fact was astonishing, in view of the further fact that they were strangers, moving each in his own set orbit, the which, however, had impinged one upon the other. As is usual in such cases, the point of contact had been marked by a woman—and that woman the painter of the Vision.

Deering read it, on the deck of the incoming steamer—the ship had been met by tugs in the lower bay, and *Tabards* were as plenty on it as blackbirds. The other side, Paris in particular, had done Deering little good. He moved heavily, almost lumpishly, his face ill-colored, and a trifle puffy about the eyes. He scowled almost incessantly as his eye ran up and down the columns of fine print. The scowl deepened to midnight blackness, when he saw Selene's name, with a caricature of her underneath it, and below that a half-column story of her life and artistic evolution. The story was a work of the purest imagination. Deering ought to have known that, but he was too nearly in a temper for connected thought or cogent reasoning. "Miss Barber," quoth the *Tabard*, through its imaginative space writer, "is a young and very beautiful woman, a member of an old and aristocratic Southern family—

the Barbers of Virginia. She came up to New York from her Virginia home, which is not very far from the habitat of the other Virginia beauty and genius, Amelie Rives, so lately as last fall. She has studied abroad, but for the last few years, directly from nature. It is the light of her own hills and valleys that shines out with such intense pathos, and still more intense beauty, from her painted Vision.

“I found her in a sky parlor, to which she had retreated before the army of reporters now besieging her. ‘I am glad, of course, to tell the *Tabard* anything I can,’ she said, ‘for there one is sure of reaching the people one cares for—also of never being misquoted. My success will not alter my plans in the least. What they are I do not just yet feel at liberty to say. Yes! perhaps I shall go abroad again next winter. But it all depends on my home people. They think me a genius, of course—they have always done that. This will not surprise them in the least. But you must really excuse me from talking about myself.’

“From another source—a very old and warm friend—I learned that there is a romance back of the picture, which I am sorry not to be able to make public just now. All that is permitted to be revealed is the fact that the first thing Miss Barber did after learning through the *Tabard* that she had made the success of the year, was to send a telegram of one word—

‘Come.’ It was addressed to a wealthy Southern mine owner—who, it is needless to add, came at once.”

Then the *Tabard* man gave a categoric account of “Miss Barber,” her features, her stature, her favorite shapes and colors in hats and frocks. Altogether, it was a most creditable effort, seeing that the young man who wrote it had no more to go on than a casual sight of her, and still more casual speech, upon Varnishing Day, and a wholly accidental knowledge of the fact that a friend of hers had sent a one-word telegram. He had been wholly honest with his paper—it was not his fault that after he had with infinite pains tracked Selene to her studio she had refused even to see him, much less to talk. Report of that fact brought imperative orders: “Get a story and a picture somehow.” So a staff artist sketched her from memory—he recalled her as having once been his fellow-pupil at the League through the space of a month. As he had a good eye and a better memory the sketch was faintly like its supposed original—enough, at least, to let the *Tabard* indulge in editorial vainglory over the way it had beaten its competitors regarding the new genius.

Deering ought to have understood all that, even if he did not. There was more excuse for Earle Brewster, who likewise read the fairy tale as he sat at breakfast in the Swell-dorf. He, too, should intuitively have known

better than to believe it—yet he did believe the most of it, and the part about the telegram made him knit his brows heavily and swear behind his mustache. Luckily, he was alone—his mother had not been well enough to come with him upon this Eastern journey. He had made a half-dozen of them since his parting with Selene—and this was the very first time he had ever got trace of her.

As he read, the old love, the old longing, rose up and mastered him. He had not lacked consolations, either,—but somehow other smiles, other faces, had not been witching enough to wholly dull the ache for Selene's loss. He dared not seek her out—it was his own act that had set a wall between them. But he might see her at a distance, might even approach her nearly in a crowd—she would never, he was certain, repudiate a claim of old friendship, if he made it before her world. He might ask—no, he could take no cognizance of the lucky mine owner. He wondered a little where and how she could have met him, and how she, the most uncompromising advocate of freedom, could have given her pledge to one of slaveholding antecedents.

All at once it flashed over him:—what if that part of the tale were false, as he knew much of the rest to be! He laughed a grim laugh to find himself so relieved. Unacknowledged there sprang up within him a hope—he would see the picture, and the painter of it—

he would first buy the Vision—then he could say, “I have some part of you. I want, as I have wanted always—I want you—all.”

He was breakfasting near noon—the night before had been a crowded one. As he passed out into the street, a carriage went swiftly by. A man looked out of the window, and scowled darkly as he shouted at the driver: “Down town! I must see that Vallery before I go home.”

Brewster could not choose but hear—the wheeling vehicle hindered his progress. As he stepped aboard the car, himself bound likewise down town, he recalled the man’s face with something like a shudder. “I should be sorry to stand in his way!” he thought. “There is no law of God or man that would stand between him and anything he wanted very badly.”

And Deering, as he sank back upon his cushions, was aware of something familiar in this casual stranger’s face. It haunted him irritatingly, until, at last, he said, swearing a great oath and slapping his knee: “Either I am bewitched, and let everything hinge upon that woman—or that fellow is the one she loved, who had not grit enough to take her, whether or no.”

He flung into Vallery’s office like a thunder gust, saying, with no pretense of greeting, as he thrust the *Tabard* under Vallery’s nose:

"What the devil and all is the meaning of this?"

"How do you do! I've seen the paper," Vallery answered, rising and pushing the paper aside as he held out a welcoming hand: "What it means? O, nothing much—except that you are certain to get back your money—with compound interest—if you will take it."

"Damn the money! You know I do not want it! Never wanted it! It's the woman herself—" Deering began, his voice hoarse and sibillant. Vallery checked him with a look.

"If you really wanted her," he said, "then I'm bound to tell you, you went about getting her a cursedly bad way."

"So! Perhaps you could have shown me a better! Perhaps you found it out—for yourself," Deering snarled. Vallery's hand clinched, but he dropped it behind him and stepped back, saying, coldly:

"As Mrs. Barber is my friend, and will be one day the friend of my wife and my daughter, all I can say, Mr. Deering, is—I hope you will take your business from this office just as soon as you can conveniently find another attorney."

"The devil you do!" Deering snarled, more angrily than before. "You may keep on hoping—I shall employ you, sir, just as long as it pleases me. Remember, you are under contract to me, for certain services. Some part of them relate to this matter we are discuss-

ing. You will please go on with that—and do as I bid you.”

“Not unless you apologize instantly,” Vallery said, folding his arms. Deering breathed heavily a minute, then burst out huskily: “You know I never do that, Vallery—but come! let bygones be bygones. I have got the devil’s own temper—and the devil’s own luck to match, it seems just about now. You—you do not know what it means to count on a thing—to watch it coming closer, closer, through years, with each day as long as two—and then, all at once, to have it whisked away from you. It’s upsetting. You will admit that—upsetting even to me—and I usually keep on an even keel.”

Vallery looked at him through a silent minute, then said, slowly:

“Deering, how came you to do this? It—your pursuit of that woman, I mean—is the only really mean thing I have ever known you to do. In the main, you are as square as a die. If you had been as square with Selene Barber as you commonly are with all the world you might have won her—in spite of law and gospel.”

Deering laughed disdainfully. “Then we will suppose my decency was offered up a burnt sacrifice for her safety,” he said. “I ought to say damn her—but somehow I cannot. Tell me about her—of course, you have seen her since all this has been happening.

Is she well? Is she happy? Has the picture gone to her head?"

"Not the least bit," Vallery said. "You will find her the same—yet not the same. She seems somehow smaller and younger, and less sure of herself than ever. In fact, she appears to be growing so unsophisticated I have suggested that if she paints another successful picture she shall have herself a guardian appointed."

"Hasn't she chosen him already? What about the telegram?" Deering said, waving the paper up and down. Vallery laughed a little.

"I know nothing about her sending any telegram," he said. "I sent one—O, yes! it concerned her—remotely. But whether it will ever concern her more nearly—why! you will have to ask her. She is the only person on earth who can say."

Deering sat down heavily, his face livid. "I've been afraid of that from the first," he said. "You had as well speak the truth—there is another man. But do not tell me it is the first one—the one who held himself too high for her. I had rather kill her, kill him, than see her belong to a man like him."

"All I know is—she has never loved this man—I doubt, and so does he, if she ever will," Vallery said. Deering drew a deep breath. "I'll give her half a million, and never come near her, if only she will send him about his

business," he said. "Do not think I am crazy, nor whining, Vallery,—but the fact is, I'm not over-long for this world. You know how my candle has been burned—at both ends and sometimes in the middle. It's beginning to flicker—I should not mind its going out if I could know before it does go out the woman who was not for me was also not for any other man."

As he hurried away, reeling a little in his gait, Vallery looked after him, and said, half aloud: "On my soul, I'm sorry for him—little as I know he deserves it."

About that minute Selene sat high above the roofs, with folded hands, in a kind of happy daze. She knew one thing alone clearly—she was free, she belonged to herself. There could be no more doubt, no more heart-breaking hope. She sat in the sunshine of certainty. Henceforth it rested solely with herself to say what her life should be.

Brentane tapped at her door, but came in before she bade him enter. "I know you are tired of hearing people tell you how great you are," he said. "I have come for something else. Am I welcome?"

"Very welcome!" Selene said, smiling and giving him her hand, "although I think I know you have come to say I am not a great person at all."

"You are a great woman," Brentane said, eyeing her narrowly. "But a great artist—"

that is another thing. Honestly now, do you believe, in the depths of your own heart, you can ever paint another Vision?"

Selene shook her head. "I am glad to say no," she said, "because—well! because I hope never again to live through—the things which have made the Vision what it is."

"So! You gauge yourself! That is much! Very much for a woman!" Brentane said. "Now, to get down to actualities—I have come to offer you something. What you say makes the offer easier—it is meant wholly in kindness, yet I did not quite know how you would take it in the first flush of success. I want you to keep on working for me—not in the old way! O, no!—under wholly new conditions. Let me send you abroad, to see and talk with the colorists there. It will broaden you, and make richer that which is best in your temperament now. You will never wholly master all the mechanical mysteries of pattern making—all the same, you can direct deft-fingered people how to make patterns such as no other mind can conceive. I have talked with one or two others, who, like myself, aspire to lead, and, in so aspiring, aim to help in teaching the world the utility of beauty. Give us your time—or even half of it. We will pay you well for it. You can travel—indeed, you must travel, to talk things over with manufacturers and color makers and dyers. But at least half the year you can have a fixed home—and

money enough to make it as beautiful as even you can desire. What do you say to me? Am I too late?"

"No! You are too early," Selene said, smiling. "I have not yet found out whether or not I ever shall want to do another stroke of work."

"At least, you will think of it?" Brentane persisted. Selene smiled brightly. "The very first thing—when I begin to think," she said. "Now I can only feel. Part of the feeling is—I am grateful, so very grateful—to you. Without you I—"

She stopped, her lips slowly whitening. Brentane got up. "Then it was as lucky for you as for me—our joining forces?" he asked. Selene answered only with a silent inclination of the head. It had all come back, in a crushing flood, the despair, the misery of those old days, and so shaken her she dared not trust her voice in speech.

CHAPTER XXIV.

After Brentane left her a sudden fancy seized her. She would muffle herself well and slip away to the Fine Arts building. She had not been inside it since the newspapers set up their hue and cry over her. It was a raw, bright day in early spring—the nipping wind would excuse any amount of swathings she might choose by way of disguise. She had not meant to leave her apartments before night-fall—but, somehow, Brentane's visit had made her restless. Things were in the air she felt—and it was better to meet them half way than to sit waiting and wondering as to what would happen next.

Perhaps Vallery might be in the building. There could be no one else whom she cared very much to see. Vallery had let her know, soon after the telegram went, that Bolton was away—nobody knew certainly where—so it was unlikely he would reach the city for a week to come. She had let the message go out of a full heart—but even the gladness of triumph had not made her sure. She wanted to see Bolton again, to look into his eyes, to listen to his voice, to touch his strong, warm hand, and with all that fresh in memory, to ask herself: “Do you care? Can you give him the love he so well deserves?”

She was too entirely his friend to think of giving him less. She knew he would give all himself, exacting nothing, but that she could never permit. Want and misery and terror had not compelled her—neither would she be compelled by love, and the offer of an honored name. She must be able to give as well as to receive, to feel that her love was crowned, no less than itself a crown, or she would walk alone all her days. Regard for Bolton would not admit of less. He was too fine, too noble, too high-souled, to be accepted for less than the highest love. He would suffer if she sent him away for always, but it would be a sharp and saving hurt to the pain he would feel in finding out his wife could give him only affectionate gratitude in place of love.

Because of this scruple she was glad he had been delayed. Now, when he came, she could look at and listen to him simply for himself. Brentane's offer had made her sure for the future. No sordid consideration of ways and means could by any chance tinge her consideration of him. If she married him, he could know it was for love, love only. Deering was out of the way now—it was only a question of days until she would be legally released from his claim. The gallery people had let her know there were already flattering offers for the Vision. The offers were held under advisement, they added. Mrs. Barber had been wise not to set a price at first—and her friend and

adviser, Mr. Vallery, insisted that no definite bargain should be struck without first consulting him.

Something of all this streamed formlessly through her mind as she skimmed the streets, choosing those that were least fashionable, hence most thronged, and the safest hiding grounds. She had put on a new gown, a rich pale purple cloth, with touches of sable at throat and wrists. There was a trig little capote to match. Selene had frankly admired her own image in the glass, and sighed a little over the necessity of spoiling the exquisite effect with a boa and veil, without form, if not void. In her simplicity she did not dream herself already a marked figure, or that her height and *svelte* lines would betray her, even though her face was invisible.

She reached the galleries in mid-afternoon. They were unusually thronged. The crowd, ever swaying, ever surging, was always thickest in front of the Vision. But the picture held less than half the gazing eyes when the whisper ran about: "There she is! Mrs. Barber! Or is it Miss? That tall woman in purple! She painted the big picture, you know. Look! Isn't she a picture herself?"

Half absently Selene had loosened the big boa, and let it trail over her arm. Through her veil she caught the glances and marked the craning of necks, the crowding round about her, the gentle inward pressure, hemming her

in like a beast at bay. She tried to ignore it—to slip through. The crowd was courteous but as immovable as a plastic mass well can be. Where one gave room for her, two crowded into the vacant space. At last one young woman, bolder than the rest, said, with a sort of merry shyness: “O! Mrs. Barber! Aren’t you happy enough to die? Seeing all these people wild about you, must tell you what a great thing you have done.”

“I am glad other people seem to think so,” Selene said, smiling and blushing. As she spoke she pulled off the veil and let her eyes range unhampered. Next minute she went white, then as suddenly turned a rosy red. Earle Brewster stood not ten feet away, looking at her with his soul in his eyes.

After just a hard breath she gave him a smiling nod. Noting its direction the crowd made way. Half a minute afterward he was holding her hand and saying: “Selene, will you ever forgive me, if I buy your Vision and put it over the altar in St. Ignatius?”

“I think not. It deserves better things than Barcelona criticism,” Selene said, smiling at him. He shook his head. “Still perverse,” he said. “Do you not know Barcelona only presumes to criticise where its criticism can hurt?”

“I know—it shall not have my picture,” Selene said, drawing a little away from him. He smiled as he saw it, saying: “You are but

little older, I see, Selene. Will you ever reach years of discretion, I wonder! Your look is exactly that of a willful child, whose most precious possession is in danger. Do not think I was in earnest about St. Ignatius. I know better than you do how the Vision would be wasted there. But I would like to own it—for a very little while. I want to give it to some great gallery, where it may stand, an eloquent advocate of your claims to all the world."

"Thank you! You are very kind," Selene murmured. "But that is something with which I have now nothing to do. You must see the gallery authorities—still, to be frank, I had a little rather you did not—yet."

"Your will is law, in any such matter," he said. "But, at least, give me a chance. I hardly think there is another prospective bidder who will appraise your work higher."

"It is not that! Please do not think so!" Selene said, eagerly. "But there is—something—something not settled. Oh!—" she broke off, suddenly, her eyes losing their light. "I must leave you—there is some one—a man I must not miss."

Deering had entered and stood near the door. He leaned heavily upon a cane, and watched her for ten seconds before he stirred. Then he moved to meet her. She was going up to him, her whole frame tense. "I am glad you have come back, Mr. Deering," she said,

not offering him her hand. "You are just in time. Remember I wrote, 'play or pay.' It makes me very happy to tell you—*it is pay.*"

"I have no doubt of that," he said, the least thickness striking through the low notes of his voice. "I ought to congratulate you—but you know how hopelessly truthful I am. I do not rejoice with you—nor for you. I am too busy sorrowing with myself."

"I am sorry for you—sorry you would not be always as kind as you were—sometimes," Selene said, very low. "When mother died—I can never forget that—O! Mr. Deering, because of that, let me forgive all you have made me suffer, and be once more my friend!"

"I wish I could, Selene! It is—impossible," Deering said, sighing deeply. "But now that you have escaped me, think of me as kindly as you can."

"I shall forget all save your kindness—when I have no more need to remember," Selene said, her voice tremulous and wistful. Deering turned away his head.

"I am going to die soon," he said. "I wish you would promise me something—a very little thing."

"What is it?" Selene asked. Deering wheeled about and faced her, as he answered, looking full in her eyes:

"O! It is only to be sure I am dead before you marry the other fellow."

Selene turned from him sharply, her cheeks crimson. He followed her and caught her arm in a strong, tense clutch. "Why! There is Vallery! The man with him? Who is he?" he asked. Selene did not answer. A leaping joy made her silent. Sight of Bolton had set every doubt at rest. He had come—the kingdom was ready for him—her happy heart rose up and acclaimed him its chosen master.

"The picture? What are they doing to it? Why, there is a placard, 'Sold,' stuck in the corner of the frame now!" Deering said, impatiently. "The gentleman who lost you, Selene, has perhaps learned wisdom by experience. I saw him with you as I came in—and was certain from your face that he was trying to get the Vision—which you did not want him to have."

"I know nothing of who has bought it," Selene said, edging away. "But, be certain, you are safe—"

"Be quiet! Never name that matter again!" Deering said, imperatively, tightening his clutch of her arm, already painful. He seemed to stoop visibly—she felt him tremble a little and shrink away, but could not free herself. Earle Brewster started toward her, but Bolton was ahead of him. He caught both her hands, and shook loose Deering's hold of her, before he said: "Perhaps I ought to have come straight to you—but I was so very anxious to

make sure of something else first! Can you not guess what that was?"

"Of course!" Selene said, smiling up at him, inexpressibly relieved to find him there, her rock and her shield. "You wanted first of all to see my picture. As if I should ever resent being second to that?"

"No! I wanted to buy your picture!" Bolton said. "What is more, I have done it—Vallery came with me on purpose to have all straight. From and after this date all inquiries for it will be sent to a man from the wild West. Are you glad or sorry?"

"I cannot say until you tell me why you bought it," Selene said, pretending to think deeply. He looked down at her a second, with a warm, compelling gaze. Her lids lifted before it, and let him see all that was in the depths of her soul. He smiled as he looked, drew her hand within his arm, and said, almost too low for other hearing:

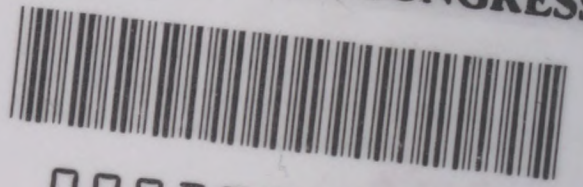
"I will tell you, though as yet it is a secret. I am to be married soon—the picture will be one of my presents to my bride."

Deering caught the words and the look. He had read aright the by-play betwixt those two so strangely flung under his gaze. With a low, gurgling cry, he flung up his arms, and fell across Selene's feet, breathless, pulseless, stone dead.

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